

THE ARGOSY.

NOVEMBER, 1883.

WINIFRED POWER.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A LAST INTERVIEW.

IN these days, Winifred Power often reflected mournfully on the curious mode in which her past had dropped away from her. Her mother had formed new ties; her adopted mother, Mrs. Russell, counted for nothing in her life; Gertrude was missing; Mark estranged. All that remained to her was Martha Freake, of whose existence two years before she had hardly known; and now it was all too visible that Martha herself must soon go. She was growing rapidly weaker; daily more in need of tending; and Winifred's time was almost exclusively absorbed in nursing her. Dolly, indeed, was willing enough to help; but she had her lessons to give, and, moreover, Martha cared for nobody but Winifred to be with her. She did not ever say this; she remained exquisitely unselfish to the last; but Winifred divined her. And these last few days of constant care seemed to the generous girl very little to give to one whose life had been so devoid of joy. The pain of seeing Martha die was largely made up of regret for the love and the hope that she had never known.

Some such thought Winifred expressed one day; when Martha said to her, "Yet you throw away your own hopes with both hands."

"Admitting that to be true, they are at least mine to throw away. I have not been defrauded of them."

"I suppose I was very strange when you first knew me?"

"A little. But you are utterly different now."

This was quite true. A kind of solemn gentleness had come over Martha, which sometimes almost awed Winifred; for she felt that such calm must be a forerunner of death. After a little, Martha spoke again.

"When I recall the long years of monotonous agony that I spent before you came, I seem to myself to have been under a torturing spell. I was like the people in fairy tales whom an evil enchantment

bereaves of human faculties. All that seemed alive in me at times was a dumb, unceasing sense of pain. And whenever this depression ceased, as I think it did with a certain regularity, I became unnaturally excited—eager—unquiet. And, what I never could shake off in this second phase, was a cruel restlessness of mind—an unceasing whirl of torturing recollections. Ah, Winifred! your invitation to come and live with you stilled that demon-dance for ever. With you I have known over again the rapture of perfect rest."

Winifred made no answer. Only softly stroked the thin grey hair from Martha's temples, and kissed her sunken cheek.

"A lady is waiting in the salon to see you," said Dolly, putting her head inside the door; and added, when Winifred had joined her in the passage; "Who do you suppose it is? Who, but Aunt Mary!"

"Aunt Mary!" exclaimed Winifred, in surprise, and hurried to the modest sitting-room, dubbed by Dolly a salon. Mrs. Russell, large, robust, fretful, upheld as she had ever been by the abiding sense of her grievances, was seated in a commodious arm-chair—every line of her attitude a protest. With a warm rush of associations that had a joy of its own, Winifred went forward, her hand outstretched; but Mrs. Russell did not relax in any way from her air of stony resentment.

"When did you come? Are your friends the Bonnards with you? Why have you not written? I would have gone to meet you. Are you quite well? I——" began Winifred, pouring out all these questions eagerly, one after another.

"I arrived last night—alone of course: what am I that anybody should bear me company? I did not write, for I presumed that you were busy: are you not always busy about everything except that which, in my day, would have been considered your duty? As to myself—you are well: what does it matter how I am?"

"I should not like you to be suffering," murmured Winifred, quite disconcerted.

"You are very good," was the icy reply. A pause, during which Mary's large, cold grey eyes travelled from one piece of furniture to the other, in the little room.

"Will you take off your bonnet?" resumed Winifred.

"I am very well as I am. I expected to find you in a garret. But I ought to have remembered that a person who spends the better part of her earnings on herself can naturally enjoy more comfort than when she remembers the claims of others upon her."

"Dolly Hatherley helps to support the household, Aunt Mary. And you *must* know that a large share of my earnings goes to relieve a need that is not my own," retorted Winifred, turning pale under the very sternness of her own rebuke.

"She is not yet dead, then, your friend?"

No answer from the girl, only a look that should have pierced Mary

Russell like a spear had she been capable of feeling it. But it merely irritated her, because making her a little ashamed of the deliberate callousness of her own question, which had been simply intended to wound Winifred.

"You might answer, I think, instead of staring theatrically, and insulting your poor aunt. If your uncle were alive, you would not dare to treat me in such a way."

"For his sake I would do anything for you—*anything*: except so far condone the wrong you once worked and have never righted, as to sit patiently by and hear you speak heartlessly of your victim."

Mrs. Russell burst into a harsh laugh. "Victim, indeed!" she exclaimed, struggling to speak through the hysterical rage that threatened to choke her. "It is part of your Pharisaism to remind me for ever of the past. You think to exalt your own virtue by it: or, rather, what you call virtue, and I call selfish hypocrisy. I am only a commonplace person, but I can see through fine words and false pretences as well as anybody else. Do you suppose I cannot understand your flimsy affectation of being more unforgiving than my 'victim?' In old days she would not have hurt a hair of my head. If she would punish me now it must be *your* fault."

Winifred stood petrified; perhaps for the first time in her life, almost scared; so unexpected was this outburst of rage, and to her so revolting in its utter stupidity. The very way in which Mary had delivered her speech gave it a kind of horror.

"I do not understand you," she exclaimed at last, amazement being the first of her many feelings to find expression.

"I understand myself," answered her aunt, returning to quietness.

"And I daresay Martha Freake will understand me also."

"She is dying," said Winifred.

"But not dead. I know she is not dead, and I will see her." And she rose.

"See her? Why?" cried the girl, springing to the door to bar its passage. "Aunt Mary, be merciful. Every breath that she draws now is a pain to her. One moment's agitation might kill her!"

"You had better let me pass, Winifred. I know more than you think. Stand aside, I say." She made an imperious gesture, and her voice rose to shrill fury.

"Not until you promise me to be calm," answered Winifred, stubbornly persistent.

Exasperated, Mary Russell seized her by the wrists and, surprise giving her the advantage, absolutely flung the petrified girl aside. Then she threw open the door, stepped swiftly across the passage, and, helped by Heaven knows what instinct, made straight for the dying woman's room. Winifred followed, trembling in every limb, but resolute to shield Martha, come what might. On the threshold of the sick chamber Mary paused an instant, and her whole appearance underwent a sudden, surprising change. Her large figure seemed to

shrink, to grow smaller; her heated features composed themselves to something approaching a smile; cringing humility was expressed in every line of her. She crossed the room with stealthy tread, paused beside the bed, and put out her hands saying, "Well Patty?"

Martha had been lying up to that moment among her pillows, stretched out in her weakness almost as straightly as on a bier. Something of the rapt surprise of eternity was already in her eyes, and she seemed as a rule to notice little that was going on around her. Half-an-hour's conversation such as that she had just had with Winifred would exhaust her for the remainder of the day. She would then lie quite still, letting people come and go, fixing on them sometimes her mournful eyes, but giving otherwise no sign that she was aware of their presence.

Not until Mary stood beside the bed did she seem to observe her: she mutely turned upon her a long, serenely-questioning glance.

Mary's face fell a little, and she broke into a nervous laugh. "You do not remember me, perhaps?"

"Yes; I remember you. You are Mary Hatherley."

"Not Hatherley any longer now—Russell. You have not forgotten poor Walter?" Mary spoke jauntily. "You know he is dead. I have been very unhappy all my life, Patty."

All at once, to Winifred's amazement, terror even, Martha raised herself and sat upright. She lifted her wasted hands and holding them between herself and her cousin, uttered the one word, "Go!"

"Martha!" The fretful tones of the protest rang through the room.

"Go!" repeated the dying woman, in just the same voice as before—a voice of passionless command. A torrent of spite and rage swept over Mary's face but for some reason she controlled herself.

"Now, Martha, don't be unkind. You are feeling poorly, I dare say; not quite yourself. I am sure this is a horrid room for you—so little air. And doubtless you have been prejudiced against me. I am such an unfortunate creature, nobody has ever made allowances for me; and perhaps in a few things I have not behaved quite well. But repentance washes out sins, you know. I hope you are not going to forget that. You used always to be a good Christian. And I am so lonely—you must come home with me ——"

"Go!" And Mrs. Russell, thus checked in the flow of her wheedling self-justification, stood with parted lips of dismay.

"Aunt Mary, I entreat of you, come away!" cried Winifred, half-terrified herself at the new strength in Martha's voice and the stony calm of her face.

"I won't go," shrieked Mrs. Russell, bursting into tears. "It is you, standing there with your solemn air, that prevents her listening to me. I dare say you have been signaling to her from behind my back. She was always weak, but she loved me. Martha, tell this girl who has come between us that you loved me!"

"Why have you come? What is it you want?"

"What do I want? Patty, how strange you are! I heard you were ill, and I am sure it is very natural that I should wish to see you again. And I want you to come to me, I have told you so already. I should have had you long ago, only that it wouldn't be unfortunate me if I had not been always so poor. Walter—well, he's dead now, and I suppose I must not blame him; but his prospects did not turn out at all what we expected in the old days. As for John—you know how *wicked* he was, Patty; he behaved badly enough to you, and, what was more, prevented me from ever explaining things. But all that is past and gone. Now I am my own mistress; not rich, for people with great professions of generosity still manage to keep me out of my own; but I have a little; I am alone, with not a soul to care for me; I think it very likely that I have not long to live, and I should so much like to spend the last days of my existence (wretched enough it has been!) with you, dear Patty."

Mary paused, quite breathless; enchanted with her speech and her various professions, which sounded so well as even to deceive herself. Finding that Martha did not answer, she advanced a step nearer, and again coaxingly put out her hand.

"And it was for this that you came; now, when I am on the brink of the grave? You wished to poison my latest moments—to remind me, I having nearly forgotten it, that the world is fuller of hate than of love, of falsehood than of truth, of cruelty than of tenderness? You would have me go into eternity with a double blasphemy on my lips—the blasphemy of pretending to forgive you, Mary Hatherley; the blasphemy of diminishing by that pretence the full acknowledgment and perfect sense of the goodness, the sweetness, and the generous pity of the girl whom you have just defamed?"

It would be impossible to describe how Martha uttered these words—her voice vibrating without one tone of passion in it, her eyes glowing with a sombre fire, her wasted face illumined with a light so far removed from earthly feeling that it was like the light of prophecy. Winifred dared not speak or move: she was awe-stricken in the presence of a power which she had never suspected and could not understand.

But with Mary, want of comprehension meant want of reverence and of shame.

"Eternity?" she echoed, harshly, "you are well prepared indeed to face it. If these are your Christian feelings——"

"Hush!" said Martha. "If I have no forgiveness, it is because you have no remorse. The love I once had for you, my cousin, has not turned to hatred; and I would hurt you as little now as in the past. No thought of anger against you has troubled the long agony of my farewell to this world. But as I have parted, one by one, with God's greatest gifts—with joy, with faith, with hope, in the end well-nigh with reason—I have gained at least that clearer insight by which

I now can read your soul. And I tell you that in assuring you of pardon, I should but utter a mockery of the promise divinely given to the sinner who repents. Across the gulf set between us by your wanton, unexpiated wrong, we can never clasp hands. At the most, I can pity—profoundly pity you for your heart unthawed by love and your eyes unsealed by truth. Because of all the gladness that you have not known, and can never know, I am sorry for you—Mary.”

Her voice fell to a cadence of solemn pathos. Winifred covered her face with her hands; and at last a chord, not of feeling, indeed, but of superstitious terror, vibrated in Mary Russell. She retreated from the bed with a shuddering cry, shrill in its feeble and petulant protest against the judgment that had overtaken her. Winifred, roused by it, looked up; then sprang towards Martha, frightened at the grey, awful change that she saw stealing over her face. Mary’s hysterical sobs grew louder, and Winifred turned to her with a distracted look: how should she induce her to go? At this moment she became aware that Dolly was in the room; since when, or summoned by what instinct, she did not know. And, before she had time to speak, her little friend went up to Mrs. Russell and spoke in a tone of cool authority.

“I think you had better come with me to the salon, Aunt Mary.”

Strange to say, Mary went, limply protesting indeed, but incapable of true resistance.

“Sit down there,” said Dolly, when they reached the sitting-room. She pointed to a sofa; on to which Mary subsided and gave way to louder weeping.

“I should try to calm myself,” resumed Dolly, composedly—as composedly as a doctor to an excited patient.

“How c—c—can I calm myself?” shrieked Mrs. Russell. “I am the most m—miserable woman on the face of the globe. N—nobody cares for me; everybody insults me. I am robbed and neglected and t—taken advantage of in every way, by the vipers that I have nourished in my bosom.”

“Ah!” remarked Dolly. “I will make you some tea.” And she set about it; brought the cups; fetched some biscuits; lighted a spirit lamp, and sat down to wait for the water to boil.

“Martha always had a nasty twist in her character; but now I think she is a little mad: don’t you?” and Mrs. Russell, somewhat cheered, raised swollen features of enquiry towards Dolly.

“Trouble does affect the mind very often; and Miss Freake has had a great deal of trouble,” responded that little person: and somehow the tone of her commonplace words made her aunt wince. She changed the subject.

“I never expected to find you so well lodged,” she remarked, resuming her criticism, apparently a hostile one, of the room.

“I don’t know whether one can be considered well lodged au

cinquième au dessus de l'entresol, and with hardly space in any room to whip a cat," answered Dolly.

"Nevertheless, rents are very dear in Paris, and this apartment must cost something more than a song. How much do you pay?" continued Mrs. Russell, abruptly.

"I really don't know. I give Winifred what I can spare out of my earnings, and she controls expenses. Latterly she has been fortunate in having some portraits to paint, and in selling a picture."

So that, what with her earnings and yours, and Martha's income you must be quite comfortable?"

"*Martha's income!* Miss Freake has not enough for daily meat," exclaimed Dolly, with characteristic energy of denial.

Mary bit her lip; and the tea being ready now, accepted a cup in silence.

The door opened, and Winifred put in a pale face. "Dolly, I want you: and please, dear, go to the door if anybody rings: I have sent Justine for the doctor. Oh, Dolly, Martha is dying!" she whispered, outside the drawing-room door.

Dolly's eyes filled with tears: for her emotions were very easily stirred in these days. "You will call me if I can do anything: and, Freda, I must say good-bye to her."

"Yes, yes, dear. But keep your aunt away."

"I will do my best. Do you know what has brought her?—She thinks Martha has money."

"Money!" Winifred repeated the word in amazement: but too full of sorrow and of occupation for further comment, she made Dolly a sign to return to the salon, and herself re-entered the bed-chamber. Dolly found Mrs. Russell very suspiciously near the door.

"What has happened?"

"Miss Freake is dying," was the young girl's curt reply.

"I must see her," began Mary.

"You will wait until the doctor comes, if you please," interrupted Dolly, with the sudden peremptoriness that belongs only to the born ruler. Mary looked baffled, but even her stupidity was conscious of the uselessness of further efforts; so she resumed her seat in sullen silence, and Dolly mounted guard over her.

Just at sunset Winifred again appeared. "Come," she said, her face as pallid as though her vigil had been counted in nights instead of hours. Dolly went noiselessly. Mrs. Russell followed, with a look in which doggedness struggled with fear.

In the sick-room, only the muffled noise of the street broke the stillness. Martha was lying quite peacefully; her life just ebbing, without a sign.

"Good-bye," murmured Dolly, weeping: but she did not stoop to kiss or touch her, finding Death, now that she looked upon it, more awfully solemn than she had guessed. At the sound of the farewell, Martha opened her eyes and the palest flicker of a smile broke the

sunken immobility of her face. She moved her head a little as though wishing Winifred to raise it, and in the very instant that this was done, she died.

Mary Russell, standing at the foot of the bed, had possibly spoken; but if so, the living did not heed, and the dead could not hear her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PRODIGAL DAUGHTER.

It was not for some two or three hours after Martha's death that Winifred joined the others in the sitting-room.

She found them very silent; Dolly's eyes were swollen with tears, and Mrs. Russell's face was full of resentful brooding.

"Do you sleep here to-night, aunt?" asked the girl, sinking wearily into a chair.

"I presume I shall be in the way."

"No, indeed. I will give you up my bed, if you do not mind sharing the room with Dolly. It is nothing to me to sleep on a sofa."

"It was not the want of room that I alluded to. I shall certainly stay."

"Then I think you might say, 'Thank you,'" muttered Dolly under her breath. Winifred did not say anything; she only raised her hand to her head with a tired gesture, repressive of supreme indifference at the moment to insinuations and suspicions of all kinds. Mary, however, could not leave her in peace.

"Will my nephew—will Mr. Mark Hatherley be sent for?"

Winifred started. In the emotion the words gave her she forgot to note their scornful intonation.

"I do not know. I have not thought about it. Do you think I ought to send for him?"

"Of course you ought. I am sure if anybody owes poor Martha the last tribute of respect, it is Mark's father's son," interposed Dolly promptly.

Her aunt looked at her half-interrogatively, half-angrily. "What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"Just what I say."

"Oh, hush! Please hush!" The wrangle jarred on Winifred's nerves; she could not bear it.

"You are very impertinent," resumed Mrs. Russell, still addressing her younger niece. "I am not surprised at it, for you have been in a bad school lately to learn either gratitude or good manners. Most people would consider it very natural that I should seek a little peace and comfort with my two nieces, one of whom was adopted by myself, while the other owes everything to my brother; but I know that I am not welcome; I am aware that you look upon me as an in-

truder : you had arranged everything nicely, you two, and I have come to spoil your plans. Nevertheless, I shall not go away ; for I have very good claims, and I intend to make them heard. I have been very patient, too patient. In the past I asked for nothing. But an end must come even to hypocrisy and scheming ; and in the future I shall always assert my rights."

"Aunt Mary," said Dolly, in a tone of serious politeness, "I think you are a little out of your mind. You looked, when you were saying all that, exactly like the last portrait taken of my grandfather, which hangs in the dining-room at The Limes. He has the look of a man who broods over things until they become distorted ; and I have often heard, that, before he died, his suspiciousness amounted to a disease. It seems to me that you are growing like him in character. There *is* something warped about us all."

"Dolly ! I will not have you speak in such a way," broke in Winifred, almost angrily.

"I am sorry, Freda, to annoy you," was Dolly's unshaken reply ; "but I cannot sit here quietly and hear you insulted and abused in your own house. I don't say anything about myself, or call it my house, because I contribute so little, and because I certainly should not be here if it were not for you. You know my opinion about you. I have often told you that you are too high-flown, and all the rest of it. And I doubt if you will ever be properly appreciated by many people. But at any rate I know that you are unselfish, kind, and noble, and when persons come here to worry and annoy you, I treat them at the worth of their intentions, and not at the value of the authority they may assume that kinship gives. Ties of blood are all very well, but common justice and honesty and elementary politeness are better."

"Oh Dolly !" cried Winifred, filled with such variety of feelings that she hardly knew whether to laugh or to cry.

The light of Dolly's self-satisfaction was still on her bonny face when Justine announced that a lady was outside, and would take no denial ; although assured that neither Mademoiselle Power nor Mademoiselle Dolly could be expected to receive visitors on this mournful evening.

"Let her come in," said Winifred : and a tall, graceful figure darkened the doorway.

"Gertrude !" exclaimed Winifred, below her breath.

Gertrude came forward with a great affectation of indifference ; but it covered a world of subdued excitement. She did not immediately recognise Mrs. Russell, who was sitting with her back to the light : and was put out at the presence, as she supposed, of a stranger. She had been chilled, too, at the news of Martha's death, which had fallen intrusively (as the solemn realities of life have a knack of doing) into the midst of her seething self-pre-occupation.

"I am sorry to have come at such a moment, Winifred ——"

"Dear Lady Hatherley!" interrupted Winifred, "don't take that tone. When did you come? Where have you been?"

Gertrude did not answer immediately, for Mrs. Russell had risen and spoken ungraciously some words of sullen greeting. It was not to be wondered at that she should regard her beautiful young sister-in-law with very scanty favour, and Winifred expected Gertrude to meet her with a stiffness equal to her own. But for the moment personal prejudice in Lady Hatherley seemed to be swallowed up in some other feeling or mixture of feelings which Winifred could not exactly make out. There was surprise in her manner, and perhaps a little suspicion.

"I want to speak to you alone," she said to Winifred.

"Then come into the bed-room. Dolly, I suppose you had better remain here." Dolly looked rather crestfallen.

"Did—was it Mr. Dallas, your brother, I mean, who brought you back?" she asked eagerly, as Gertrude neared the door, and Winifred paused indulgently to leave time for the answer.

Lady Hatherley answered that she had arrived by herself, that she knew nothing whatever about her brother. Upon which Dorothy's curiosity fell below zero, and she submitted very patiently to the prospect of a fresh tête-à-tête with her exasperated and sulky aunt.

Once in the bed-room, and in answer to Winifred's first question as to the cause of her long disappearance, Gertrude burst out into one of her old tirades; in which the iniquities of Sir John, the calumnies circulated at Elmsleigh, the suspicions of everybody, her happiness at the Grahams' and her disgust at being forced to leave them, were mixed up with her invariable wealth of self-pity, her usual mad despair at her destiny, and her customary railing at the imbecility of the world.

She poured it all out so rapidly that Winifred could not manage to put in a word for a long time, and it was only when Gertrude at last paused from sheer exhaustion, that she quietly said: "But, my dear, nobody suspects you any more."

Gertrude sat bolt upright and stared at her. She had been nursing her scare so long as to warm it into a very respectable entity, and its sudden destruction fell upon her with the force of a blow. Very dimly too she began to perceive that she might have been a little—just a very little—ridiculous.

"I—I don't understand."

Then Winifred—in possession since the morning, of her mother's letter, in which Mrs. Burton had said: "I am told now that (*doubtless through some judicious hushing up*, of which we shall never know the *truth*) the coroner's jury have decided for accidental death;" aware too of all the accounts that had reached the Dallases from The Limes—proceeded to enlighten Gertrude as to the events which had taken place since her precipitate departure.

She carefully suppressed, of course, all unfavourable comments, and laid great stress on Mark's efforts, and his own and Dick's anxiety.

That all this gratified Gertrude was evident. In fact, relief at the result of the inquest, and the sense of having occupied a great number of people about herself for more than a fortnight, combined to put her into quite a genial mood, and inclined her to lend a willing ear to Winifred's suggestion that she should return to her own family.

"It is not that I am not glad to have you, dear; but I know that your mother has hungered and thirsted for the sight of your face and as for Georgie, she has been in the finest effervescence of sisterly partizanship that I ever witnessed in my life."

"I always said there was good in the child," remarked Gertrude magnificently.

"Then you *will* go home?"

"To oblige you, Winifred, I will make the experiment. But if they lecture me, I shall leave again — *at once*."

"Very well, dear," answered Winifred patiently; shrewdly suspecting that this dauntless declaration covered a real desire for shelter and repose. "Dolly shall go with you. I should like her to tell them — about poor Martha."

"Did Mrs. Russell worry her?"

The question surprised Winifred. "There was a dreadful scene," she replied. "But have you any special reason for asking, Gerty?"

"Oh, no!" Yet the tone was doubtful.

They returned to the sitting-room, and Dolly was bidden to put on her hat; also, thanks to Winifred's thoughtfulness, to telegraph to Mark acquainting him with Gertrude's reappearance and Martha's death. All of which was done.

This news brought the two young men to Paris with the smallest possible delay; and the next evening Richard Dallas walked in upon his assembled family. Gertrude having been made tremendously much of for four-and-twenty hours was in the highest good-humour, and actually went forward to greet him with an affectionate smile.

"Are you not glad to see me again?" she enquired, a little provoked at the extreme coolness of his manner.

"Enchanted," he answered. "But I should have been still more so a fortnight ago, when your reappearance would have possessed the singular charm of appropriateness. However, I must not complain; for your amiable vagaries procured me a very pleasant fortnight at The Limes with Hatherley, who, though somewhat freezingly high principled, is a rattling good fellow."

And Dick, sauntering forward, bestowed a kiss upon his stepmother, pulled Georgie's ear, nodded to his father, and mentioned that he should like some supper.

"Dear Gerty has been giving us a charming account of her stay at the Grahams'; they seem such kind people! I really must write to-morrow and thank them," said Mrs. Dallas, an hour later.

"You arrived last night, I understand," said Richard, abruptly addressing his sister. "But you left the Grahams' on the morning of the previous day. Where did you spend the intermediate time?"

Gertrude tossed her head. "With my uncle, Ralph Mercer."

Mrs. Dallas gave a cry, and dropped the work. She had not heard her brother's name for years, and was almost painfully affected.

"Where did you meet him?—How did you know him? Be good enough to explain," commanded Mr. Dallas, curtly.

"I knew him in Turin," answered Gertrude: at which a certain wave of embarrassment passed over her hearers. The reader will remember that she had gone as a teacher to a school in Turin, after the Marseilles adventure, and this was a subject to which her family never alluded. "He had drifted there somehow, I really never enquired how, and was professor of caligraphy (that was what they called it) at the school."

"I think I remember to have heard that some forms of caligraphy—such as the imitative—were much in his line," interposed Mr. Dallas, grimly.

"He was very poor, and very miserable, being just then at one of his lowest ebbs, for he has wonderful ups and downs," continued Gertrude. "He guessed my identity from my name; stopped me in the street one day; asked me a few questions, and claimed me for his niece. At the same time he begged me not to mention, even to any of you, that he had met me. In fact, he was not known in Turin under his own name, and he was full of mysteries altogether."

"Poor dear Ralph!" exclaimed Mrs. Dallas, wiping her eyes. "What a comfort you must have been to him, Gerty."

"When Dick got me that place at The Limes, Ralph was in London, brought thither by what adventure I cannot tell, and calling himself, as at Turin, Colonel Quince. He had apparently had a stroke of good luck, for he was living in quite luxurious lodgings, and giving himself the airs of a millionaire. I kept up a kind of connection with him, and it was fortunate I did so. For there came a moment, as you know, when, thanks to the evil destiny that governs all my affairs, I was without a friend, or a place to go to, until it occurred to me to seek shelter and help from him."

"He always had a kind heart," said Mrs. Dallas, gently, and that was all the answer Gertrude got to her flourish.

"Why did he write to you so often at The Limes?" questioned Dick.

"For money," replied Gertrude, promptly, but turned rather red.

"And what became of the proceeds of your jewels?"

"I asked no questions," she said, loftily.

A sardonic laugh from Dick; then Mr. Dallas, in his turn, put a question.

"And where may be the present resting-place, and what is the actual occupation, of this interesting individual, Colonel Quince?"

"To tell the truth," said Gerty, "he is on his way here."

"By jove!" cried Richard, springing up. "I should not be a bit surprised if he were the unique individual with whom we came over in the boat to-day. His face struck me dimly as being familiar. He talked Boulevard French, with a British accent, exhibited a diamond ring (perhaps it was one of yours, Gerty), and——forgive me, mother! you must admit that your brother is a remarkable specimen, and has to be classified somehow," wound up the young man, pausing in his excited description as he caught sight of his gentle stepmother's grieved face.

"I cannot bear to think of him all alone in this big, wicked place, and I, his sister, with a home to offer him," began Mrs. Dallas: when she was cut short by an imperious ring at the bell.

"Enter our long-lost!" exclaimed Dick. But his stepmother rose, trembling.

The door was thrown open by the maid: when, faultlessly dressed, benign and calmly smiling, in walked Ralph Mercer.

"My own darling, *darling* brother!" And Mrs. Dallas fell into the reprobate's arms, with all the fervour of affection bestowed by women since the world began upon the scapegrace and the spendthrift.

Ralph was equal to the occasion, and exhibited a fine air of emotion. Georgie, between curiosity and nervousness, was moved to tears; and the Princess Badoura arched her back. Otherwise, the display of emotion was limited.

"You will have something to eat? You will sleep here? No! You have dined, and prefer an hotel? Unkind! Georgie, push over that arm-chair for your uncle."

"Is this my youngest niece?" asked Ralph, seizing Georgie by a lanky arm, and proceeding to inspect her. "Too angular as yet, but she will run you close in a few years, Gertrude. And this is doubtless the young man, Dicky, whom I remember in petticoats and curls? As for you, Dallas, you are looking remarkably well. How goes the world with you? Always impecuniously?"

For once Mr. Dallas found no sarcastic retort. He looked supremely disgusted.

"I think that our generation—yours and mine, Dallas—was principally distinguished for robustness of constitution. You are very little altered, and, I flatter myself, so am I."

"Humph!"

"I am just what you remember me; incurably young; the best fellow in the world, but too confiding. There is no specimen of human depravity that has not come some time or other under my notice; and yet—would you believe it?—to your systematic villain, your thorough-going egotist, I am as clay in the hand of the potter."

"And is it to some potter of that description that we are indebted your presence in Paris, sir!" enquired Richard, respectfully.

Ralph waved his hand; sweeping away the epigram as beneath his

notice. "My views in coming to Paris are strictly domestic. I am, in fact, thinking of getting married."

"*Married!*" The word was repeated by everybody in chorus, with a great variety of intonation.

"Is she young?"

"Is she nice, darling?"

"Has she any money?"

"Is she lately escaped from Bedlam?" This last question, uttered sotto voce, came from Mr. Dallas.

But Ralph was impenetrable, so they had to give up questioning him; and Mrs. Dallas proceeded to pour a stream of mild gossip into his ear.

"Your old flame, Mary Hatherley, now Walter Russell's widow, was here just now. I never spoke to her about you, for I really felt I could not, after your having been so shamefully treated."

"Ah!" Ralph half closed his eyes. "What is she doing here?"

"I hardly know ——"

"But I do," interposed Georgie, triumphantly. "Dolly Hatherley told me this morning she was quite sure that the only thing which brought her was the idea of extracting money out of poor Miss Freake."

"And unfortunately," remarked Gertrude quietly, speaking for the first time, "Miss Freake is dead."

"Dead? Martha Freake dead!"

"Dear Ralph!" said Mrs. Dallas, affectionately. "You have not seen any of these people for twenty-five years and more, and yet your kind heart, I see, makes you feel for them still."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DISAPPOINTED.

MARK and Winifred met with an emotion that was all the stronger for being suppressed on both sides. The girl, indeed, felt her heart sink within her, as she lifted her eyes to the young man's grave, sad glance, for while she had never felt so keenly that Mark's love would be all in all to her, also never had it seemed more evident that his love must be numbered among the things of the past. He held her hand indeed, and looked long into her eyes; but his manner was so calm, his tone so quiet, his whole air so absorbed, that she dared not think of herself as occupying any place in his thoughts.

Mary Russell was as good as her word, and showed no intention whatever of quitting the field. What her motive could be in remaining, Winifred found it difficult to guess. Dolly's idea, that she suspected Miss Freake of having had money seemed, at first sight, too preposterous for acceptance; nevertheless, as the days went on, several

small signs appeared almost to confirm it. For one thing, Mary rarely left Mark and Winifred alone: never if she could help it.

Martha had hardly been carried to her last resting-place, when Winifred received a letter from Mrs. Burton which, with much semblance of sweet persuasion, in reality commanded her to come home. She really did not feel as if she had any valid excuse for resisting. Such work as she still had on hand could be finished at Elmsleigh, while Dolly's lessons were ceasing owing to the dispersion for the summer, of her pupils. Winifred, feeling listless through the reaction of the late emotion, was almost glad to have her course made out for her. For the summer and autumn months she could return to Elmsleigh; and afterwards——? well, afterwards, something would present itself. She bent her face upon her hands and the bitter waters of loneliness closed over her soul.

That same evening when Mark, who had come in rather contrary to his custom, announced his intention of soon leaving Paris, she stated her resolution.

"You can make mamma's mind easy by assuring her that I, at any rate, shall soon be in Elmsleigh. About Dolly, I am not so sure. The Dallases have invited her, and she seems unable to tear herself away from—— shall we say Georgie, Dolly?"

"You can say Georgie if you like," replied Miss Dolly.

"And what about Miss Freake's affairs?" suddenly interposed Mary, her harsh voice harsher than usual. Even Mark turned and looked at her in surprise.

"You must know quite well that if by 'affairs' you mean money, the poor creature had nothing but the miserable annuity on which she lived here, Heaven knows how, until Miss Power came to her aid, and which went (its principal, I mean) on her death to some distant cousin in Australia."

It was Mark who thus answered, with some impatience.

Mary shook her head. "You don't deceive *me*."

"Indeed? Then perhaps you will kindly explain yourself."

Her face darkened at the cold scorn of his tone, and both her own voice and her hands began to tremble with anger as she retorted: "Explanations should come from you. How is it that, since my cousin's death, none of her boxes have been opened, none of her drawers examined, nor her papers read?"

"Aunt Mary! what do you expect us to find there? What could the poor thing leave, beyond mute and simple records of the poverty that she endured so nobly, and mementos of an existence that those who knew her longest should least wish to have recalled?" exclaimed Winifred, indignantly.

Mary Russell made no answer, only looked at her with an expression that stung Mark into a reproof.

"And if she had left millions, Aunt Mary, what claim upon them could be yours?" he asked.

"A——h!" The long cry broke from her, so charged with unholy rage that it startled her three listeners as they had been rarely startled in their lives. "What claims? More, perhaps, than your scandalous laws, if you invoke them, may allow; but a claim, nevertheless, of which the acknowledgment through very shame shall be extorted from you inch by inch and shilling by shilling, until it is counted out. Do you suppose that now when, after years of poverty and disappointment, the unutterable baseness of your father and my brother has been revealed to me, I can still keep so much faith in human nature as to accept the miserable pittance with which you seek to put me off? Do you think that ——"

"Enough!" interrupted Mark, and the sternness of his voice and manner silenced even Mary's fury. "To-morrow such testimony as the dead woman's papers can afford shall be submitted to your scrutiny."

"I shall have a person to meet you who knows more than you think," exclaimed Mrs. Russell.

"You may have the Court of Chancery if you can get it," responded Mark, as he took his leave.

"What a scene!" exclaimed Dolly, in high excitement, when Mrs. Russell had swept away to her room. "You look as if you had seen a ghost, Winifred. Now I feel rather pleased to think that when our amiable aunt's card-castle topples down, as it infallibly must to-morrow, she will be so enraged as not to be able any longer to bear the sight of us. And then she will go, which will be a relief. And had I not better write to Rich—to Mr. Dallas—to be present? The more clear heads we have on our side the better."

"That is a transparent device for getting Richard here," said Winifred, lifting Dolly's chin with her finger, and looking laughingly down on her pretty face. "But write by all means."

Dolly did not fail to write, nor Richard to come on the morrow. He was accompanied by Gertrude.

"As I hear that Mark is to be called to account for his treatment of the Hatherleys in general, and as I am now one of them, I thought I had better assist at the scene," she remarked to Winifred.

"Mark makes you an allowance, then?"

"That is to say, after his father's death, and as soon as affairs had been investigated, with what disastrous results we know, he wrote to Mrs. Hatherley and Mrs. Russell informing them how much (or, as they think, I fancy, how little) he could do for them. And on his arrival here the other day he addressed a similar note to myself."

"Poor Hatherley!" exclaimed Richard. "I should like to know how many men would hamper themselves with the debts of a prodigal father, and the maintenance of half a dozen relatives, mostly of the parasitic order!"

"I wonder that under the circumstances he gave himself so much trouble to find you, Lady Hatherley," remarked Dolly, with the

admirable air of unconscious childishness under cover of which she shot most of her barbed shafts. And Winifred, being human after all, could scarcely refrain from an approving smile. What were all these people that they should dare to think Mark had done too little for them? If generosity were beyond them, could they not at least be grateful?

Gertrude had apparently not heeded Dolly's observation: at any rate, she did not answer it, and all general conversation was presently put a stop to by the entrance of Mrs. Russell. She was one of the people who act as a wet blanket always, and on this occasion her flushed, sullen face and ungracious manner were even less inviting than usual. She took her seat in silence; folded her hands and waited—grim as Destiny. She was still a striking-looking woman, on a massive scale, and although her countenance was unpleasant, it had all the stateliness of outline that distinguished her handsome race. Winifred, watching her with a kind of fascination, fell to musing on the Hatherleys and their strange, sometimes strong—sometimes fell—characteristics. How much more deeply marked than most people's was their individuality! Mary and her brother had turned the ugly side of the family qualities outermost; for in them craft had taken the place of judgment, selfishness of calm endurance, obstinacy of courage. Nevertheless, they presented contrasts that made them worth studying.

Even Mark and Dolly were true Hatherleys, though they wore their type "with a difference." Mark had the noblest qualities of his noblest ancestor, and yet there was just the danger, as Winifred sorrowfully felt, that he might harden under poverty into too bitter a pride. Something—perhaps the sweetness and gentleness of his long-dead mother—had set a well of tenderness in the depths of his reserved nature: would this also be poisoned? Alas! there was no saying.

As for Dolly, her sturdy intrepidity came from the paternal stock; while the winsome beauty that she had inherited from her mother, who once had been beautiful, carried her triumphantly through every minor trouble of life.

The next to enter was Mark. He glanced round the room, then said carelessly and coldly: "I see we are not complete. But a gentleman followed me upstairs, who is, I presume, Mrs. Russell's adviser."

"No!" exclaimed Dolly and Richard simultaneously, as a portly figure darkened the door; and Dick added: "This is Mr. Mercer, Winifred; come doubtless to pay his respects to you; but the moment is not happily chosen."

"Mr. Mercer has come at my request, and is my friend," interposed Mary Russell. "He is the one person in the world whom my affairs still interest; and, most fortunately for me, he is the one person best qualified to defend them."

"Miss Power must kindly excuse my intrusion," said Ralph, bowing and speaking with an airy equanimity singularly contrasted to Mary's tragic voice. "And this is Mr. Mark Hatherley? I had, shall I say, the honour of knowing your father?"

"You may say it if you choose," answered Mark, with a dangerous look.

"Ahem!" The airiness this time was slightly more artificial, for Ralph had some perception, and Mark's manner had not encouraged him. "We had better, I suppose, proceed at once to business. Miss Power, will you lead the way to the bed-room of the late lamented lady?"

Mary Russell, without a shadow of embarrassment, produced the key of the door from her pocket. She had laid hands upon it the previous evening "for fear of midnight visits"; and it was she who now opened the room where Martha had died.

"If you wish to save time you will begin with that old black box," said Winifred, coldly addressing Ralph, without looking at him. "You can search elsewhere afterwards if you are not satisfied, but I know that Miss Freake kept her papers there."

Ralph, turning rather red at her tone, went down upon his knees in front of the box, and tumbled its contents out upon the floor. They were mostly shabby trifles, pathetic in their very shabbiness, because of the poverty of possessions, of aspirations and memories that had made them worth the hoarding. One packet of papers after another was eagerly untied, examined and hastily thrown aside. At last an exclamation of triumph suddenly broke from Ralph.

"Here, if I am not greatly mistaken, is something worth reading." He held up a letter for inspection. "This is in your father's handwriting. Shall I be permitted to read it aloud?" Mark gave no sign of dissent, so Ralph unfolded the paper and began:—

"MY DEAR MARTHA,—You have chosen to withdraw yourself beyond the reach of your relatives, and to wrap yourself in an impenetrable silence. A feeling of bitterness, which I have some reluctance to believe can include myself, doubtless explains your resolution.

"But I know how to excuse, and how to forgive, and I have not forgotten the sympathy you showed me in old days when I had nobody but yourself to confide in. I am aware, too, through a curious accident, that you rendered my father some secret service for which he was very grateful; doubtless he would have rewarded you had his sudden death not prevented him from adding any codicil to his will. I confess to some curiosity to know what this secret service was. You can understand that, did I know its exact nature and extent, I might rate it even higher than he did, and be in proportion more willing to mark my sense of it in a permanent and substantial way. In a word, I am willing to pay you a fixed income, and if you will add to my old obligations towards you, as friend and

confidant, by enlightening me as to the cause of my father's gratitude, I may very likely increase that income by a considerable sum.

'Yours faithfully,

'JOHN HATHERLEY.

'P.S.—£10,000 once, as I know, invested by my father in the Pocahontas Railway, cannot be accounted for. Can you throw any light on the matter?'

"I might," said Ralph, laying down the letter, and producing a small portfolio from his breast-pocket. "I have searched long without finding anything so good for my purpose as that letter. That I should have chanced upon it is a fact that I regard as a direct interposition of Providence in favour of the injured and despoiled. What I have now to ask you all to listen to is the answer."

"And that if you please, I will read aloud," suddenly broke in Gertrude; and, before he could even guess her intention, she had snatched a letter from his hand: "This," she said, "was written by Miss Freake:—

"Morally, I have not yet sunk so low, my cousin, that I could accept the means of livelihood from the hand that has stricken me. To do so would be to condone the baseness and confirm the lie that have blasted my name and my life. I trust that I may misjudge you; but, half-mad though I am, I am bewildered. There are many things I cannot understand; but I think that the reason why you betrayed me was that—little as you had really told me—you still told me too much. And perhaps there was method in your cruelty. Secrets I can keep; but wrongs I have yet to learn to condone. For the rest, be certain that you will never learn the truth regarding the £10,000 from me. The sum is in safe keeping, and will eventually return to a Hatherley. Leave me to my poverty; and when you hear that I am dead, do not, even if you can, feel remorseful; for no boon that can henceforth be bestowed on me will be as welcome as the silence and peace of the grave.

MARTHA FREAKE.'

Gertrude's voice deepened as she read these mournful concluding words; and the silence which succeeded to them was caused by an emotion more or less profound.

Lady Hatherley herself was the first again to speak. "You will wonder," she said, addressing Mark, "why I should have interfered to read out this letter. The truth is, it was through me, I regretfully own, that Uncle Mercer became possessed of it. I entered The Limes, although Richard did not know it, as an adventuress. He," pointing to Ralph "had assured me that there was some secret in your family which, if once discovered, would be the source to himself and his accomplices of perpetual wealth. I have long learnt to believe that he was utterly misled, if not as to the existence

of this secret, at any rate as to its importance. But he seemed to think that the proof of it would give him some kind of hold over Sir John. For the rest, as to the exact nature of the secret he was never explicit. One time it seemed to me to have something to do with a will: another time, with a marriage. I was to spy and listen; observe and draw conclusions. If possible, I was to discover a secret drawer and to find, and forward to him, certain old letters from America, having relation to a family of Hatherleys there. I accepted the mission, not so much—although nobody will perhaps believe me—with any idea of ultimate gain to myself, as because I liked the flavour of an intrigue. Time went on, and I married Sir John. I watched my husband at the bureau, and at last hit upon what I believed to be the secret of the drawer. I went down one night to experiment, and you, Mark, know the result. Mrs. Hatherley followed, watched me, and finally sprang upon me just as I had discovered the receipt for the Psalter. But what she had not seen and could not know was that I had found and taken possession of Miss Freake's letter. For Mr. Mercer's purpose there was nothing else of any importance in the drawer. It was full principally of unpaid bills and threatening letters from creditors. This is all I have to say: and I know," wound up Gertrude, in her reckless way, "that in now saying it and betraying my confederate, I am playing just as sorry a part as previously in aiding and abetting him. But at least this scene, and the unjust attack of which you, Mark, are the object, give me the opportunity of expressing—not my remorse, for that is of little use—but my sense of your goodness and generosity, with my determination to earn my own bread by any honest means, and at any cost, rather than add by a feather's weight to your many burdens."

"Bravo, Gerty!" cried Dolly, and jumping up, embraced her.

The movement was a real inspiration; for it relieved the tension of everybody's nerves, and served to bring them back to the commonplace.

"And I am sure," resumed Dolly, looking round, her arm still on Lady Hatherley's shoulder, "that I shall never take a shilling from you, Mark: so there are two off you."

"Are you then so enchanted with teaching that you intend to continue it indefinitely?" asked Mark, with his kindly smile.

"So she says. But she is first herself to be taught obedience, which is the first duty of a wife," interrupted Richard, and Dolly flashed on the circle a radiant glance of bliss.

"How much longer do you intend this farce to continue?" suddenly broke in Mary's discordant tones, as she turned furiously on the discomfited Ralph. That gentleman's plight was indeed pitiable. The effect which he had prepared with so much care had been turned from its proper course by Gertrude and sprung like a mine beneath his feet. His courage, always factitious, was fast evaporating; but Mrs. Russell's glance brought it back. With a swagger, he thrust

his hand into the breast of his coat, and took up the thread of his story.

"You have not yet done with me, Mr. Hatherley —"

"No, indeed, I have not," interrupted Mark, with slighting contempt. "Perhaps you will be so good as to state what object, other than the inadmissible one of self-exposure, brought you here to-day?"

"Softly, if you please," answered Ralph, insolently, although he quailed beneath the young man's glance. "You will have to come down a note or two, sir. Grant that my object is not very clear. When one has to try and square accounts with an arch-deceiver such as your father, everything is dark at first. To start with at all, I had to construct a theory, which briefly is this: Miss Freake rendered your grandfather a service, and was very probably paid for it. I make no account of the apparent contradiction to this in your father's offer to reward her: for he was evidently only feeling his way. On the other hand, Miss Freake lived in Paris, the most expensive capital in Europe, for many years, ostensibly on nothing —"

"She lived, if semi-starvation can be called living, on £40 a-year, supplemented by a few miserable earnings," interrupted Winifred.

"I don't believe it," answered Ralph, and his manner made Mark's eyes flash. "It is far more conceivable that she enjoyed a portion, and laid by the rest, of an income made over to her on the understanding that it was to revert at her death to one of the Hatherley family. The passage about the £10,000 in his letter carries out this theory, and my belief is that she bequeathed the principal and all her savings to her trusty and well-beloved cousin, Mr. Mark Hatherley."

A silence of a few moments ensued, caused probably by sheer surprise on the part of the majority at this fantastic conclusion.

"Rather a weak-legged theory after all, Uncle Ralph. I should have thought a person of your experience might have invented something better," observed Richard, at last, with mocking politeness.

Ralph changed colour and bit his lip, turning at the same time a wavering glance on Mary Russell. Evidently the blank amazement with which his hypothesis had been received disconcerted him considerably. The truth was, that Martha's death had upset all his own and Mary's calculations. They had hoped to wring from her some confession in regard to the money; and next to induce her to leave, at least, a portion of it to Mary. This project frustrated, Ralph himself had been but little inclined to do anything more; but Mary's baffled rage could not admit the possibility of total defeat, and she had clung to the conviction that Martha must have left hidden away a will, or other proof of property, or perhaps a hoard of money. Chance having, at last, fully revealed to Ralph the fraud by which John became possessed of all his father's wealth, Mary's anger had risen to frenzy. "Something must—*should* be done to right her," she said

and re-said. This dream, since they entered Martha's bed-room, had been growing every moment dimmer. No will had been found, and no money either. The obvious sincerity of Mark's amazement at the mention of the £10,000 had carried conviction to Ralph Mercer. The man was discouraged—cooled—a trifle ashamed. Moreover, the afternoon was wearing on, and he felt hungry.

He had meant to startle Mark by informing him of his father's full baseness: but now it struck him that this precious piece of information would be appropriately reserved for another occasion. Advancing a step or two, he held out his hand to the petrified Mark and said impressively: "Forgive me!"

"Are you mad?" shrieked Mary, while her nephew retreated several paces and looked at Mr. Mercer's extended hand with an air of the frankest aversion.

"Mad?" echoed Ralph mournfully, and struck an attitude worthy of Chatham. "No, Mary, my long lost love, my late-found friend, not mad; though Fate has indeed done its worst to make me so! My reason," continued Mr. Mercer, almost hysterically, "is unaffected, but my heart is wrung at the sense of the cruel part which principle on the one hand, the irony of chance on the other, have condemned me to play. I am an outcast, a wanderer, a cumberer of the soil—I know it, feel it, admit it. But every chivalrous instinct—my only heritage from a long line of ancestors—is not so dead within me as to leave me incapable of repentance. I have wronged Mr. Hatherley: I beg his pardon. He will not accept my excuses. I regret it, but resign myself to be misjudged. I feel that my place is no longer in this house; good breeding bids me leave it, and I follow the dictates of a gentleman's strongest sentiment."

He bowed like Sir Charles Grandison; caught up his hat with suspicious swiftness; turned on his heel, and decamped: Mary staring after him with an expression of stony fury, to which the countenance of Medusa must have been a trifle.

A pause; and then a shout of light laughter came from Richard. Mrs. Russell turned slowly round and fixed on the irreverent Dick a glance so gruesome that it ought to have frozen every drop of blood within his veins. But unfortunately it only had the effect of sending him off into fresh and louder peals of merriment. Mary turned purple; glared; actually raised her hand as if to strike him. Dick, however, had reached that stage in which he could hardly have stopped laughing had he wished: and he did not wish. And Mary, after one long, outraged, stare at his impiety, precipitated herself across the room like a stone from a catapult, dashed along the little antechamber, and vanished.

(To be concluded.)

A CURIOUS EXPERIENCE.

WHAT I am about to tell of took place during the last year of John Whitney's life, now many years ago. We could never account for it, or understand it : but it occurred (at least, so far as our experience of it went) just as I relate it.

It was not the custom for schools to give a long holiday at Easter then : one week at most. Dr. Frost allowed us from the Thursday in Passion week, to the following Thursday ; and many of the boys spent it at school.

Easter was late that year, and the weather lovely. On the Wednesday in Easter week, the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley drove over to spend the day at Whitney Hall, Tod and I being with them. Sir John and Lady Whitney were beginning to be anxious about John's health—their eldest son. He had been ailing since the previous Christmas, and he seemed to get thinner and weaker. It was so perceptible when he got home from school this Easter, that Sir John put himself into a flurry (he was just like the Squire in that and in many another way), and sent an express to Worcester for Henry Carden, asking him to bring Dr. Hastings with him. They came. John wanted care, they said, and they could not discover any specific disease at present. As to his returning to school, they both thought that question might be left with the boy himself. John told them he should prefer to go back, and laughed a little at this fuss being made over him : he should soon be all right, he said ; people were apt to lose strength more or less in the spring. He was sixteen then, a slender, upright boy, with a delicate, thoughtful face, dreamy, grey-blue eyes and brown hair, and he was ever gentle, sweet-tempered, and considerate. Sir John related to the Squire what the doctors had said, avowing that he could not "make much out of it."

In the afternoon, when we were out of doors on the lawn in the hot sunshine, listening to the birds singing and the cuckoo calling, Featherston came in, the local doctor, who saw John nearly every day. He was a tall, grey, hard-worked man, with a face of care. After talking a few moments with John and his mother, he turned to the rest of us on the grass. The Squire and Sir John were sitting on a garden bench, some wine and lemonade on a little table between them. Featherston shook hands.

"Will you take some?" asked Sir John.

"I don't mind a glass of lemonade with a dash of sherry in it," answered Featherston, lifting his hat to rub his brow. "I have been walking beyond Goose Brook and back, and upon my word it is as hot as midsummer."

"Ay, 'tis," assented Sir John. "Help yourself, doctor."

He filled a tumbler with what he wanted, brought it over to the opposite bench, and sat down by Mrs. Todhetley. John and his mother were at the other end of it; I sat on the arm. The rest of them, with Helen and Anna, had gone strolling away; to the North Pole, for all we knew.

"John still says he shall go back to school," began Lady Whitney, to Featherston.

"Ay; to-morrow's the day, isn't it, John? Black Thursday, some of you boys call it."

"I like school," said John.

"Almost a pity, though," continued Featherston, looking up and about him. "To be out at will all day in this soft air, under the blue skies and the healing sunbeams, might be of more benefit to you, Master John, than being cooped up in a close schoolroom."

"You hear, John!" cried Lady Whitney. "I wish you would persuade him to take a longer rest at home, Mr. Featherston!"

Mr. Featherston stooped for his tumbler, which he had lodged on the smooth grass, and took another drink at it before replying. "If you and John would follow my advice, Lady Whitney, I'd give it."

"Yes?" cried she, all eagerness.

"Take John somewhere for a fortnight, and let him go back to school at the end," said the surgeon. "That would do him good."

"Why of course it would," called out Sir John, who had been listening. "And I say it shall be done. John, my boy, you and your mother shall go to the seaside—to Aberystwith."

"Well, I don't think I should quite say that, Sir John," said Featherston again. "The seaside would be all very well in this warm weather; but it may not last, it may change to cold and frost. I should suggest one of the inland watering-places, as they are called: where there's a Spa, and a Pump Room, and a Parade, and lots of gay company. It would be lively for him, and a thorough change."

"What a nice idea!" cried Lady Whitney, who was the most unsophisticated woman in the world. "Such as Pumpwater."

"Such as Pumpwater: the very place," agreed Featherston. "Well, were I you, my lady, I would try it for a couple of weeks. Let John take a companion with him; one of his schoolfellows. Here's Johnny Ludlow: he might do."

"I'd rather have Johnny Ludlow than anybody," said John.

Remarking that his time was up, for a patient waited for him, and that he must leave us to settle the question, Featherston took his departure. But it appeared to be settled already.

"Johnny can go," spoke up the Squire. "The loss of a fortnight's lessons is not much, compared with doing a little service to a friend. Charming spots are those inland watering-places, and Pumpwater is about the best of them all."

"We must get lodgings," said Lady Whitney presently, when they

had done expatiating upon the gauds and glories of Pumpwater. "To stay at an hotel would be so noisy; and expensive besides."

"I know of some," cried Mrs. Todhetley, in sudden thought. "If you could get into Miss Gay's rooms, you would be well off. Do you remember them?"—turning to the Squire. "We stayed at her house on our way from ——"

"Why, bless me, to be sure I do," he interrupted. "Somebody had given us Miss Gay's address, and we drove straight to it to see if she had rooms at liberty; she had, and took us in at once. We were so comfortable there that we stayed at Pumpwater three days instead of two."

It was hastily decided that Mrs. Todhetley should write to Miss Gay, and she went indoors to do so. All being well, Lady Whitney meant to start on Saturday.

Miss Gay's answer came punctually, reaching Whitney Hall on Friday morning. It was addressed to Mrs. Todhetley, but Lady Whitney, as had been arranged, opened it. Miss Gay wrote that she should be much pleased to receive Lady Whitney. Her house, as it chanced, was then quite empty; a family, who had been with her six weeks, had just left: so Lady Whitney might take her choice of the rooms, which she would keep vacant until Saturday. In conclusion, she begged Mrs. Todhetley to notice that her address was changed. The old house was too small to accommodate the many kind friends who patronised her, and she had moved into a larger house, superior to the other and in the best position.

Thus all things seemed to move smoothly for our expedition; and we departed by train on the Saturday morning for Pumpwater.

It was a handsome house, standing in the high road, between the parade and the principal street, and rather different from the houses on each side it, inasmuch as that it was detached and had a narrow slip of gravelled ground in front. In fact, it looked too large and handsome for a lodging-house; and Lady Whitney, regarding it from the fly which had brought us from the station, wondered whether the driver had made a mistake. It was built of red-brick, with ornamental white stone facings; the door, set in a pillared portico, stood in the middle, and three rooms, each with a bay window, lay one above another on both sides.

But in a moment we saw it was all right. A slight, fair woman, in a slate silk gown, came running out and announced herself as Miss Gay. She had a mild, pleasant voice, and a mild, pleasant face, with light falling curls, the fashion then for everybody, and she wore a lace cap, trimmed with pink. I took to her and to her face at once.

"I am glad to be here," said Lady Whitney, cordially, in answer to Miss Gay's welcome. "Is there anyone who can help with the luggage? We have not brought either man or maid-servant."

"Oh dear yes, my lady. Please let me show you indoors, and

then leave all to me. Susannah!—Oh, here you are, Susannah! Where's Charity?—my cousin and chief help-mate, my lady."

A tall, dark person, about Miss Gay's own age, which might be forty, wearing brown ribbon in her hair and a purple bow at her throat, dropped a curtsy to Lady Whitney. This was Susannah. She looked strong-minded and capable. Charity, who came running up the kitchen stairs, was a smiling young woman-servant, with a coarse apron tied round her, and red arms bared to the elbow.

There were four sitting-rooms on the ground floor: two in front, with their large bay windows; two at the back, looking out upon some bright, semi-public gardens.

"A delightful house!" exclaimed Lady Whitney to Miss Gay, after she had looked about a little. "I will take one of these front rooms for our sitting-room," she added, entering, haphazard, the one on the right of the entrance-hall, and putting down her bag and parasol. "This one, I think, Miss Gay."

"Very good, my lady. And will you now be pleased to walk upstairs and fix upon the bedrooms."

Lady Whitney seemed to fancy the front of the house. "This room shall be my son's; and I should like to have the opposite one for myself," she said, rather hesitatingly, knowing they must be the two best chambers of all. "Can I, Miss Gay?"

Miss Gay seemed quite willing. We were in the room over our sitting-room on the right of the house looking to the front. The objection, if it could be called one, came from Susannah.

"You can have the other room, certainly, my lady; but I think the young gentleman would find this one noisy, with all the carriages and carts that pass by, night and morning. The back rooms are much more quiet."

"But I like noise," put in John; "it seems like company to me. If I could do as I would, I'd never sleep in the country."

"One of the back rooms is very lively, sir; it has a view of the turning to the Pump Room," persisted Susannah, a kind of suppressed eagerness in her tone; and it struck me that she did not want John to have this front chamber. "I think you would like it best."

"No," said John, turning round from the window, out of which he had been looking, "I will have this. I shall like to watch the shops down that turning opposite, and the people who go into them."

No more was said. John took this chamber, which was over our sitting-room, Lady Whitney had the other front chamber, and I had a very good one at the back of John's. And thus we settled down.

Pumpwater is a nice place, as you would know if I gave its proper name, bright and gay, and our house was in the best of situations. The principal street, with its handsome shops, lay to our right; the Parade, leading to the Spa and Pump Room, to our left, and company and carriages were continually passing by. We visited some of the shops and took a look at the Pump Room.

In the evening, when tea was over, Miss Gay came in to speak of the breakfast. Lady Whitney asked her to sit down for a little chat. She wanted to ask about the churches.

"What a very nice house this is!" again observed Lady Whitney presently: for the more she saw of it, the better she found it. "You must pay a high rent for it, Miss Gay."

"Not so high as your ladyship might think," was the answer; "not high at all for what it is. I paid sixty pounds for the little house I used to be in, and I pay only seventy for this."

"Only seventy!" echoed Lady Whitney, in surprise. "How is it you get it so cheaply?"

A waggonette, full of people, was passing just then; Miss Gay seemed to want to watch it by before she answered. We were sitting in the dusk with the blinds up.

"For one thing, it had been standing empty for some time, and I suppose Mr. Bone, the agent, was glad to have my offer," replied Miss Gay, who seemed to be as fond of talking as anybody else is, once set on. "It had belonged to a good old family, my lady, but they got embarrassed and put it up for sale some six or seven years ago. A Mr. Calson bought it. He had come to Pumpwater about that time from foreign lands; and he and his wife settled down in the house. A puny, weakly little woman she was, who seemed to get weaker instead of stronger, and in a year or two she died. After her death her husband got ill; he went away for change of air, and died in London; and the house was left to a little nephew living over in Australia."

"And has the house been vacant ever since?" asked John.

"No, sir. At first it was let furnished, then unfurnished. But it had been vacant some little time when I applied to Mr. Bone. I conclude he thought it better to let it at a low rent than for it to stand empty."

"It must cost you incessant care and trouble, Miss Gay, to conduct a house like this—when you are full," remarked Lady Whitney.

"It does," she answered. "One's work seems never done—and I cannot, at that, give satisfaction to all. Ah, my lady, what a difference there is in people!—you would never think it. Some are so kind and considerate to me, so anxious not to give trouble unduly, and so satisfied with all I do that it is a pleasure to serve them: while others make gratuitous work and trouble from morning till night, and treat me as if I were just a dog under their feet. Of course when we are full I have another servant in, two sometimes."

"Even that must leave a great deal for yourself to do and see to."

"The back is always fitted to the burden," sighed Miss Gay. "My father was a farmer in this county, as his ancestors had been before him, farming his three hundred acres of land, and looked upon as a man of substance. My mother made the butter, saw to the poultry,

and superintended generally her household : and we children helped her. Farmers' daughters then did not spend their days in playing the piano and doing fancy work, or expect to be waited upon like ladies born."

"They do now, though," said Lady Whitney.

"So I was ready to turn my hand to anything when hard times came—not that I had thought I should have to do it," continued Miss Gay. "But my father's means dwindled down. Prosperity gave way to adversity. Crops failed; the stock died off; two of my brothers fell into trouble and it cost a mint of money to extricate them. Altogether, when father died, but little of his savings remained to us. Mother took a house in the town here, to let lodgings, and I came with her. She is dead, my lady, and I am left."

The silent tears were running down poor Miss Gay's cheeks.

"It is a life of struggle, I am sure," spoke Lady Whitney, gently.

"And not deserved, Miss Gay."

"But there's another life to come," spoke John, in a half whisper, turning to Miss Gay from his favourite ground, the large bay-window. "None of us will be overworked *there*."

Miss Gay stealthily wiped her cheeks. "I do not repine," she said, humbly. "I have been enabled to rub on and keep my head above water, and to provide little comforts for mother in her need; and I gratefully thank God for it."

The bells of the churches, ringing out at eight o'clock, called us up in the morning. Lady Whitney was downstairs first, I next. Susannah, who waited upon us, had brought up the breakfast. John followed me in.

"I hope you have slept well, my boy," said Lady Whitney, kissing him. "I have."

"So have I," I put in.

"Then you and the mother make up for me, Johnny," he said; "for I have not slept at all."

"Oh John!" exclaimed his mother.

"Not a wink all night long," added John. "I can't think what was the matter with me."

Susannah, then stooping to get the sugar-basin out of the side-board, rose, turned sharply round and fixed her eyes on John. So curious an expression was on her face that I could but notice it.

"Do you not think it was the noise, sir?" she said to him. "I knew that room would be too noisy for you."

"Why the room was as quiet as could be," he answered. "A few carriages rolled by last night—and I liked to hear them; but that was all over before midnight; and I have heard none this morning."

"Well, sir, I'm sure you would be more comfortable in a back room," contended Susannah.

"It was a strange bed," said John. "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night."

Breakfast was half over when John found he had left his watch upstairs, on the chest of drawers. I went to fetch it.

The chamber door was open, and I stepped to the drawers, which stood just inside. Miss Gay and Susannah were making the bed and talking, too busy to see or hear me. A lot of things lay on the white cloth, and at first I could not see the watch.

"He declares he has not slept at all; *not at all*," Susannah was saying with emphasis. "If you had only seconded me yesterday, Harriet, they need not have had this room. But you never made a word of objection; you gave in at once."

"Well, I saw no cause to make it," said Miss Gay, mildly. "If I were to give in to your fancies, Susannah, I might as well shut up the room. Visitors must get used to it."

The watch had been partly hidden under one of John's neck-ties. I caught it up and decamped.

We went to church after breakfast. The first hymn sung was that nice one beginning, "Brief life."

"Brief life is here our portion;
Brief sorrow, short-lived care;
The life that knows no ending,
The tearless life is *there*."

As the verses went on, John touched my elbow: "Miss Gay," he whispered; his eyelashes moist with the melody of the music. I have often thought since that we might have seen by these very moods of John—his thoughts bent upon Heaven more than upon earth—that his life was swiftly passing.

There's not much to tell of that Sunday. We dined in the middle of the day; John fell asleep after dinner; and in the evening we attended church again. And I think everybody was ready for bed when bedtime came. I know I was.

Therefore it was all the more surprising when, the next morning, John said he had again not slept.

"What, not at all!" exclaimed his mother.

"No, not at all. As I went to bed, so I got up—sleepless."

"I never heard of such a thing!" cried Lady Whitney. "Perhaps, John, you were too tired to sleep?"

"Something of that," he answered. "I felt both tired and sleepy when I got into bed; particularly so. But I got no sleep: not a wink. I could not lie still, either; I was frightfully restless all night; just as I was the night before. I suppose it can't be the bed?"

"Is the bed not comfortable?" asked his mother.

"It seems as comfortable a bed as can be when I first lie down in. And then I get restless and uneasy."

"It must be the restlessness of extreme fatigue," said Lady Whitney. "I fear the journey was rather too much for you, my dear."

"Oh I shall be all right as soon as I can sleep, mamma."

We had a surprise that morning. John and I were standing before a tart shop, our eyes glued to the window, when a voice behind us called out, "Don't they look nice, boys!" Turning round, there stood Henry Carden of Worcester, arm-in-arm with a little white-haired gentleman. Lady Whitney, in at the fishmonger's next door, came out while he was shaking hands with us.

"Dear me!—is it you?" she cried to Mr. Carden.

"Ay," said he in his pleasant manner, "here am I at Pumpwater! Come all this way to spend a couple of days with my old friend: Dr. Tambourine," added the surgeon, introducing him to Lady Whitney. Anyway, that was the name she understood him to say. John thought he said Tamarind, and I Carrafin. The street was noisy.

The Doctor seemed to be chatty and courteous, a gentleman of the old school. He said his wife should do herself the honour of calling upon Lady Whitney if agreeable; Lady Whitney replied that it would be. He and Mr. Carden, who would be starting for Worcester by train that afternoon, walked with us up the Parade to the Pump Room. How a chance meeting like this in a strange place makes one feel at home in it!

The name turned out to be Parafin. Mrs. Parafin called early in the afternoon, on her way to some entertainment at the Pump Room: a chatty, pleasant woman, younger than her husband. He had retired from practice, and they lived in a white villa outside the town.

And what with looking at the shops, and parading up and down the public walks, and the entertainment at the Pump Room, to which we went with Mrs. Parafin, and all the rest of it, we felt uncommonly sleepy when night came, and were beginning to regard Pumpwater as a sort of Eden.

"Johnny, have you slept?"

I was brushing my hair at the glass, under the morning sun, when John Whitney, half-dressed, and pale and languid, opened my door and thus accosted me.

"Yes; like a top. Why? Is anything the matter, John?"

"See here," said he, sinking into the easy-chair by the fire-place, "it is an odd thing, but I have again not slept. I *can't* sleep."

I put my back against the dressing-table and stood looking down at him, brush in hand. Not slept again! — It *was* an odd thing.

"But what can be the cause, John?"

"I am beginning to think it must be the room."

"How can it be the room?"

"I don't know. There's nothing the matter with the room that I can see; it seems well-ventilated; the chimney's not stopped-up. Yet this is the third night that I cannot get to sleep in it."

"But *why* can you not get to sleep," I persisted.

"I say I don't know why. Each night I have been as sleepy as possible; last night I could hardly undress I was so sleepy; but no sooner am I in bed than sleep goes right away from me. Not only that: I get terribly restless."

Weighing the problem this way and that, an idea struck me.

"John, do you think it is nervousness?"

"How can it be? I never was nervous in my life."

"I mean this: Not sleeping the first night, you may have got nervous about it the second and third."

He shook his head. "I have been nothing of the kind, Johnny. But look here: I hardly see what I am to do. I cannot go on like this without sleep; yet, if I tell the mother again, she'll say the air of the place does not suit me and run away from it——"

"Suppose we change rooms to-night, John?" I interrupted. "I can't think but you would sleep here. If you do not, why it must be the air of Pumpwater, and the sooner you are out of it the better."

"You'd not mind changing rooms for one night?" he said, wistfully.

"Mind! Why I shall be the gainer. Yours is the best room of the two."

At that it was settled; nothing to be said to anybody about the bargain. We did not want to be kidnapped out of Pumpwater—and Lady Whitney had promised us a night at the theatre.

Two or three more acquaintances were made, or found out, that day. Old Lady Scott heard of us, and came to call on Lady Whitney; they used to be intimate. She introduced some people at the Pump Room. Altogether, it seemed that we should not lack society.

Night came; and John and I went upstairs together. He undressed in his own room, and I in mine; and then we made the exchange. I saw him into my bed and wished him a good-night.

"Good-night, Johnny," he answered. "I hope you will sleep."

"Little doubt of that, John. I always sleep when I have nothing to trouble me. A very good-night to *you*."

I had nothing to trouble me, and I was as sleepy as could be; and yet, I did not and could not sleep. I lay quiet as usual after getting into bed, yielding to the expected sleep, and I shut my eyes and never thought but it was coming.

Instead of that, came restlessness. A strange restlessness quite foreign to me, persistent and unaccountable. I tossed and turned from side to side, and I had not had a wink of sleep at morning light, nor any symptom of it. Was I getting nervous? Had I let the feeling creep over me that I had suggested to John? No; not that I was aware of. What could it be?

Unrefreshed and weary, I got up at the usual hour, and stole silently into the other room. John was in a deep sleep, his calm face lying still upon the pillow. Though I made no noise, my presence awoke him.

"Oh Johnny!" he exclaimed, "I have had *such* a night."

"Bad?"

"No; *good*. I went to sleep at once and never woke till now. It has done me a world of good. And you?"

"I? Oh well, I don't think I slept quite as well as I did here; it was a strange bed," I answered, carelessly.

The next night the same plan was carried out, he taking my bed; I his. And again John slept through it, while I *did not sleep at all*. I said nothing about it: John Whitney's comfort was of more importance than mine.

The third night came. This night we had been to the theatre, and had laughed ourselves hoarse, and been altogether delighted. No sooner was I in bed, and feeling dead asleep, than the door slowly opened and in came Lady Whitney, a candle in one hand, a wine-glass in the other.

"John, my dear," she began, "your tonic was forgotten this evening. I think you had better take it now. Featherston said, you know — Good gracious!" she broke off. "Why, it is Johnny!"

I could hardly speak for laughing, her face presented such a picture of astonishment. Sitting up in bed, I told her all; there was no help for it: that we had exchanged beds, John not having been able to sleep in this one.

"And do you sleep well in it?" she asked.

"No, not yet. But I feel very sleepy to-night, dear Lady Whitney."

"Well, you are a good lad, Johnny, to do this for him; and to say nothing about it," she concluded, as she went away with the candle and the tonic.

Dead asleep though I was, I could not get to sleep. It would be simply useless to try to describe my sensations. Each succeeding night they had been more marked. A strange, discomfoting restlessness pervaded me; a feeling of uneasiness, I could not tell why or wherefore. I saw nothing uncanny, I heard nothing; nevertheless, I felt just as though some uncanny presence was in the room, imparting a sense of semi-terror. Once or twice, when I nearly dozed off from sheer weariness, I started up in real terror, wide awake again, my hair and face damp with a nameless fright.

I told this at breakfast, in answer to Lady Whitney's questions: John confessed that precisely the same sensations had attacked him the three nights he lay in the bed. Lady Whitney declared she never heard the like; and she kept looking at us alternately, as if doubting what could be the matter with us, or whether we had taken scarlet fever.

On this morning, Friday, a letter came from Sir John, saying that Featherston was coming to Pumpwater. Anxious on the score of his son, he was sending Featherston to see him, and take back a report. "I think he would stay a couple of days if you made it convenient

to entertain him, and it would be a little holiday for the poor hard-worked man," wrote Sir John, who was just as kind-hearted as his wife.

"To be sure I will," said Lady Whitney. "He shall have that room; I dare say he won't say he cannot sleep in it: it will be more comfortable for him than getting a bed at an hotel. Susannah shall put a small bed into the back room for Johnny. And when Featherston is gone, I will take the room myself. I am not like you two silly boys—afraid of lying awake."

Mr. Featherston arrived late that evening, with his grey face of care and his thin frame. He said he could hardly recal the time when he had had as much as two days' holiday, and thanked Lady Whitney for receiving him. That night John and I occupied the back room, having conducted Featherston in state to the front, with two candles; and both of us slept excellently well.

At breakfast Featherston began talking about the air. He had always believed Pumpwater to have a rather soporific air, but supposed he must be mistaken. Anyway, it had kept him awake; and it was not a little that did that for him.

"Did you not sleep well?" asked Lady Whitney.

"I did not sleep at all; did not get a wink of it all night long. Never mind, my lady," he added with a good-natured laugh, "I shall sleep all the sounder to-night."

But he did not. The next morning (Sunday) he looked grave and tired, and eat his breakfast almost in silence. When we had finished, he said he should like, with Lady Whitney's permission, to speak to the landlady. Miss Gay came in at once: in a light fresh print gown and black silk apron.

"Ma'am," began Featherston, politely, "something is wrong with that bedroom overhead. What is it?"

"Something wrong, sir?" repeated Miss Gay, her meek face flushing. "Wrong in what way, sir?"

"I don't know," answered Featherston; "I thought perhaps you could tell me: anyway, it ought to be seen to. It is something that scares away sleep. I give you my word, ma'am, I never had two such restless nights in succession in all my life. Two such *strange* nights. It was not only that sleep would not come near me; that's nothing uncommon, you may say; but I lay in a state of uneasy, indescribable restlessness. I have examined the room again this morning, and I can see no cause to induce it, yet a cause there must undoubtedly be. The paper is not made of arsenic, I suppose?"

"The paper is pale pink, sir," observed Miss Gay. "I fancy it is the green papers that have arsenic in them."

"Ay; well. I think there must be poison behind the paper; in the paste, say," went on Featherston. "Or perhaps another paper underneath has arsenic in it?"

Miss Gay shook her head, as she stood with her hand on the back of a chair. Lady Whitney had invited her to sit, but she declined.

"When I came into the house six months ago, that room was re-papered, and I saw that the walls were thoroughly scraped. If you think there's anything—anything in the room that prevents people sleeping, and—and could point out what it is, I'm sure, sir, I should be glad to remedy it," said Miss Gay, with uncomfortable hesitation.

But this was just what Featherston, for all he was a doctor, could not point out. That something was amiss with the room, he felt convinced, but he had not discovered what it was, or how it could be remedied.

"After lying in torment half the night, I got up and lighted my candle," said he. "I examined the room and opened the window to let the cool breeze blow in. I could find nothing likely to keep me awake, no stuffed-up chimney, no accumulation of dust; and I shut the window and got into bed again. I was pretty cool by that time and reckoned I should sleep. Not a bit of it, ma'am. I lay more restless than ever, with the same unaccountable feeling of discomfort and depression upon me. Just as I had felt the night before."

"I am very sorry, sir," sighed Miss Gay, taking her hand from the chair to depart. "If the room is close, or anything of that——"

"But it is not close, ma'am. I don't know what it is. And I'm sure I hope you will be able to find out, and get it remedied," concluded Featherston as she withdrew.

We then told him of our experience: John's and mine. It amazed him. "What an extraordinary thing!" he exclaimed. "One would think the room was haunted."

"Do you believe in haunted rooms, sir?" asked John.

"Well, I suppose such things are," he answered. "Folks say so. If haunted houses exist, why not haunted rooms?"

"It must lie in the Pumpwater air," said Lady Whitney, who was too practical to give in to haunted regions; "and I am very sorry you should have had your two nights' rest spoilt by it, Mr. Featherston. I will take the room myself: nothing keeps me awake."

"Did you ever see a ghost, sir?" asked John.

"No, never. But I know those who have seen them; and I cannot disbelieve what they say. One such story in particular is often in my mind; it was a very strange one."

"Won't you tell it us, Mr. Featherston?"

The doctor only laughed in answer. But after we came out of church, when he was sitting with me and John on the Parade, he told it. And I only wish I had space to relate it here.

He left Pumpwater in the afternoon, and Lady Whitney had the room prepared for her use at once, John moving into hers. So that I had mine to myself again, and the little bed was taken out of it.

The next day was Monday. When Lady Whitney came down in the morning the first thing she told us was, that she had not slept. All the curious symptoms of restless disturbance, of inward agitation, which we had experienced, had visited her.

"I will not give in, my dears," she said, bravely. "It may be, you know, that what I had heard against the room took all sleep out of me, though I was not conscious of it; so I shall keep to it. I must say it is a most comfortable bed."

She "kept" to the room until the Wednesday; three nights in all; getting no sleep. Then she gave in. Occasionally during the third night, when she was dropping asleep from exhaustion, she was startled up from it in sudden terror: terror of she knew not what. Just as it had been with me and with John. On the Wednesday morning she told Susannah that they must give her the back room opposite mine, and we would abandon that front room altogether.

"It is just as though there were a ghost in the room," she said to Susannah.

"Perhaps there is, my lady," was Susannah's cool reply.

On the Friday evening Dr. and Mrs. Parafin came in to tea. Our visit would end on the morrow. The old doctor held John before him in the lamplight, and decided that he looked better—that the stay had done him good.

"I am ~~the~~ it has," assented Lady Whitney. "Just at first I feared he was going backward: but that must have been owing to the sleepless nights."

"Sleepless nights!" echoed the Doctor, in a curious tone.

"For the first three nights of our stay here, he never slept; *never slept at all*. After that ——"

"Which room did he occupy?" interrupted the Doctor, breathlessly. "Not the one over this?"

"Yes, it was. Why? Do you know anything against it?" questioned Lady Whitney, for she saw Dr. and Mrs. Parafin exchange glances.

"Only this: that I have heard of other people who were unable to sleep in that room," he answered.

"But what can be amiss with the room, Dr. Parafin?"

"Ah," said he, "there you go beyond me. It is, I believe, a fact, a singular fact, that there is something or other in the room which prevents people sleeping. Friends of ours who lived in the house before Miss Gay took it, ended by shutting the room up."

"Is it haunted, sir?" I asked. "Mr. Featherston thought it might be."

He looked at me and smiled, shaking his head. Mrs. Parafin nodded hers, as much as to say *It is*.

"Nobody has been able to get any sleep in that room since the Calsons lived here," said Mrs. Parafin, dropping her voice.

"How very strange!" cried Lady Whitney. "One might think murder had been done in it."

Mrs. Parafin coughed significantly. "The wife died in it," she said. "Some people thought her husband had—had—at least hastened her death ——"

"Hush, Matty!" interposed the Doctor, warningly. "It was all rumour; all talk. Nothing was proved—or attempted to be."

"Perhaps there existed no proof," returned Mrs. Parafin. "And if there had—who was there to take it up? She was in her grave, poor woman, and he was left flourishing, master of himself and everybody about him. Anyway, Thomas, be that as it may, you cannot deny that the room has been like a haunted room since."

Dr. Parafin laughed lightly, objecting to be serious; men are more cautious than women. "I cannot deny that people find themselves unable to sleep in the room; I never heard that it was 'haunted' in any other way," he added, to Lady Whitney. "But there—let us change the subject; we can neither alter the fact nor understand it."

After they left us, Lady Whitney said she should like to ask Miss Gay what her experience of the room had been. But Miss Gay had stepped out to a neighbour's, and Susannah stayed to talk in her place. She could tell us more about it, she said, than Miss Gay.

"I warned my cousin she would do well not to take this house," began Susannah, accepting the chair to which Lady Whitney pointed. "But it is a beautiful house for letting, as you see, my lady, and that and the low rent tempted her. Besides, she did not believe the rumour about the room; she does not believe it fully yet, though it is beginning to worry her: she thinks the inability to sleep must lie in the people themselves."

"It has been an uncanny room since old Calson's wife died in it, has it not, Susannah?" said John, as if in jest. "I suppose he did not murder her?"

"*I think he did,*" whispered Susannah.

The answer sounded so ghostly that it struck us all into silence.

Susannah resumed. "Nobody *knew*: but one or two suspected. The wife was a poor, timid, gentle creature, worshipping the very ground her husband trod on, yet always in awe of him. She lay in the room, sick, for many many months before she died. Old Sarah ——"

"What was her sickness?" interrupted Lady Whitney.

"My lady, that is more than I can tell you; more, I fancy, than anybody could have told. Old Sarah would often say to me that she did not believe there was any great sickness, only he made it out there was, and persuaded his wife so. He could just wind her round his little finger. The person who attended on her was one Astrea, quite a heathenish name I used to think, and a heathenish woman too: she was copper-coloured, and came with them from abroad. Sarah was in the kitchen, and there was only a man besides. I lived housekeeper at that time with an old lady on the Parade, and I looked in here from time to time to ask after the mistress. Once I was invited by Mr. Calson upstairs to see her: she lay in the room over this; the one that nobody can now sleep in. She looked so pitiful!—her poor, pale, patient face down deep in the pillow. Was she better, I asked; and what was it that ailed her. She thought it was not

much beside weakness, she answered, and that she felt a constant nausea; and she was waiting for the warm weather: her dear husband assured her she would be better when that came."

"Was he kind to her, Susannah?"

"He seemed to be, Master Johnny; very kind and attentive indeed. He would sit by the hour together in her room, and give her her medicine, and feed her when she grew too weak to feed herself, and sit up at night with her. A doctor came to see her occasionally; it was said he could not find much the matter with her but debility, and that she seemed to be wasting away. Well, she died, my lady; died quietly in that room; and Calson ordered a grand funeral."

"So did Jonas Chuzzlewit," breathed John.

"Whispers got afloat when she was under ground—not before—that there had been something wrong about her death; that she had not come by it fairly, or by the illness either," continued Susannah. "But they were not spoken openly; under the rose, as may be said; and they died away. Mr. Calson continued to live in the house as before; but he became soon ill. Real sickness, his was, my lady, whatever his wife's might have been. His illness was chiefly on the nerves; he grew frightfully thin; and the setting-in of some grave inward complaint was suspected: so if he did act in any ill manner to his wife it seemed he would not reap long benefit from it. All the medical men in Pumpwater were called to him in succession; but they could not cure him. He kept growing thinner and thinner till he was like a walking shadow. At last he shut up his house and went to London for advice; and there he died, fourteen months after the death of his wife."

"How long was the house kept shut up?" asked Lady Whitney, as Susannah paused.

"About two years, my lady. All his property was willed away to the little son of his brother, who lived over in Australia. Tardy instructions came from thence to Mr. Jermy the lawyer to let the house furnished, and Mr. Jermy put it into the hands of Bone the house-agent. A family took it, but they did not stay: then another family took it, and they did not stay. Each party went to Bone and told him that something was the matter with one of the rooms and nobody could sleep in it. After that, the furniture was sold off, and some people took the house by the year. They did not remain in it six months. Some other people took it then, and they stayed the year, but it was known that they shut up that room. Then the house stayed empty. My cousin, wanting a better house than the one she was in, cast many a longing eye towards it; finding it did not let, she went to Bone and asked him what the rent would be. Seventy pounds to her, he said; and she took it. Of course she had heard about the room, but she did not believe it; she thought, as Mr. Featherston said the other morning, that something must be wrong with the paper, and she had the walls scraped and cleaned and a fresh paper put on."

"And since then—have your lodgers found aught amiss with the room?" questioned Lady Whitney.

"I am bound to say they have, my lady. It has been the same story with them all—not able to get to sleep in it. One gentleman, an old post-captain, after trying it a few nights, went right away from Pumpwater, swearing at the air. But the most singular experience we have had was that of two little girls. They were kept in that room for two nights, and each night they cried and screamed all night long, calling out that they were frightened. Their mother could not account for it; they were not at all timid children, she said, and such a thing had never happened with them before. Altogether, taking one thing with another, I fear, my lady, that something *is* wrong with the room. Miss Gay sees it now: but she is not superstitious, and she asks *what* it can be."

Well, that was Susannah's tale: and we carried it away with us on the morrow.

Sir John Whitney found his son looking all the better for his visit to Pumpwater. Temporarily he was so. Temporarily only; not materially: for John died before the year was out.

Have I heard anything of the room since, you would like to ask. Yes, a little. Some eighteen months later, I was halting at Pumpwater for a few hours with the Squire, and ran to the house to see Miss Gay. But the house was empty. A black board stood in front with big white letters on it TO BE LET. Miss Gay had moved into another house facing the Parade.

"It was of no use my trying to stay in it," she said to me, shaking her head. "I moved into the room myself, Master Johnny, after you and my Lady Whitney left, and I am free to confess that I could not sleep. I had Susannah in, and she could not sleep; and, in short, we had to go out of it again. So I shut the room up, sir, until the year had expired, and then I gave up the house. It has not been let since, and people say it is falling into decay."

"Was anything ever *seen* in the room, Miss Gay?"

"Nothing," she answered, "or heard either; nothing whatever. The room is as nice a room as could be wished for in all respects, light, large, cheerful, and airy; and yet nobody can get to sleep in it. I shall never understand it, sir."

I'm sure I never shall. It remains one of those curious experiences that cannot be solved in this world. But it is none the less true.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

GEORGE HERBERT.

IN the course of our English springs and autumns there are a few perfect days in which the sun sheds exactly the right degree of warmth and heat : we are not scorched, we are not dazzled ; the breeze brings us precisely the refreshment which braces weary nerves and frames. Yet sweet and fair as such days are, they are not days of which it is easy to give a long description. There is such a delicate blending of harmonious tints, such a mixture of charms that please every sense, that we cannot, strive as we will, find words to tell of our experiences.

How much more readily could we give an account of a day of storm, when the wind was howling, or the rain rushing down, or when the thunder roll and lightning flash were filling the ear with awful music, and making the landscape shine with strange, unwonted radiance ! And how we could draw out, in glowing language, our narrative of days spent amid the glories of tropical brilliancy and beauty, when every gorgeous flower, and every spreading leaf, and every creeper that wrapped the tall tree trunks in a mantle of rich, luxuriant verdure, seems a wonder upon which our surprised mind cannot dwell too long !

What we have just said of the life of external nature, holds good when we come to give a vivid, distinct word-portrait of the lives of different men. A life full of violent passions, or of sudden, startling incidents, a life which now shows the height of virtue and now the depths of vice, is far more easy to describe than the calm, steadfast Christian life which shines with a uniform brightness from dawn to setting.

The life of George Herbert, the Christian pastor and poet, is one of these lives, of which, from its very beauty, its very changeless, subdued brightness, it is difficult to give a strongly-coloured picture that will bring out his image plainly and sharply, as we glance backward through the long colonnades of hard on three centuries. Yet it is such a life of Christian light and loveliness that we cannot choose but endeavour to do our utmost to make it come clearly, and in no uncertain shape, and tinged by no dim, watery tints, before the mental vision of our readers of to-day.

It was a spring morning in 1593, and still the age when the heart of England was throbbing with the wonders which the Reformation had wrought in the land, when pure Gospel truth was such a new thing in the nation still that men and women deemed it a most fair and rich possession. All the Welsh hills and valleys were bathed in a great tide of gold that had chased away the mountain mists and the dewy vapours which rose from stream and meadow. In the

old Castle of Montgomery there was a stir and a bustle, and a running to and fro of sewing-men, and an important whispering among dames and damsels, both in curtained bower and by the broad kitchen hearth.

What is it all about? Let us go upstairs to see.

Down the long corridor we pass, and enter a chamber where feet are treading lightly. How warm, and heavy, and stifling the atmosphere of the room is! We wonder how an invalid—for it is most certainly a sick room; the darkened window tells us as much—can breathe in so sultry an air. Yet in the days to which we have transported ourselves every lady of rank, on occasions like the present, had to submit to weeks of imprisonment in a closely sealed chamber. Now let us draw near the bed, and pull back, softly, the heavy curtains which fold it round on every side. It must be a very slight opening that we make, or we shall call forth such a chorus of screams, and exclamations, and cries of horror from lady aunts and cousins as we shall not soon forget. The faintest current of air must not be allowed to creep into that sanctuary. What is it we see there, and which has been the centre of all the tumult and all the mystery which has pervaded the Castle since early dawn? It is a young mother sleeping with her new-born son at her side, and the infant is no other than George Herbert.

The child inherited noble blood from both his parents. And also from them both, especially from his mother, inborn nobleness of thought, word and action seem to have been his birthright. The chapter of his boyhood, unlike the usual case of young genius, tells of no wild pranks, no ungoverned whims and moods; it is all one shining morning, which gives full promise of what the day is to be. Those were times when Scripture texts were the daily food of the national mind, and many a Bible word made familiar music round his cradle; times when men and women could still tell, from personal recollections, how martyrs died for their faith. Many such a tale of Christian heroism must have made the boy's cheek glow and his eye flash. He had, probably, no child's books except his lesson-books; but Welsh ballad and romance filled his young fancy with greater and brighter wonders than leap out to-day from the many-tinted pictured page into the small heads that people our modern nurseries.

So the little lad grew on, finding day by day, in the very air around him, food to strengthen the sinews of the young Christian soldier, and the pinions of the waking poet. So he grew, under the high, pure, healthy influence of his mother, who was a woman well worthy of the task which God had put into her hands: the task of moulding the mind of George Herbert, and giving it a shape and colouring which it was to keep throughout his life.

In those days an English lad moved onward with a rapidity which seems, to our nineteenth-century eyes, to have something of the hot

house about it, and which we should have thought did not, in some cases, tend to promote mental development in a natural, healthy way. A child was a schoolboy when, in our age, he would still be in the nursery, and he was a university undergraduate when it appears to us that he ought still to have been playing at marbles. The result was frequently a certain stiffness and priggishness in bearing and conversation. This, however, does not seem to have been the case with George Herbert, for though he was sent to Westminster School at a very early age, and though we find him entered at Cambridge when he was but fifteen, he is said to have been always remarkable for a cheery, light-hearted brightness of manner, which made his presence like a brisk breeze wherever he came. He was a special favourite with both his companions and his teachers. Yet, with all his sweet, airy playfulness, his life was marked by a purity which stands out in radiant contrast to the lives of the generality of the English youth of rank of his day.

At college George Herbert's intellectual power made its weight felt in the classical studies of the university. His contemporaries all saw that a star was rising among them, but of what nature its light would be, and in what direction it would shine, no one, as yet, could foretell. When his terms at Cambridge were expired, his mind, which was not at this period so fully fixed on a life wholly given to God as it afterwards became, turned first towards a career at court as a statesman or a diplomatist, the path most generally taken and followed by young men of family in that age. The post of public orator just then fell vacant at the university. Young Herbert's eloquence was a household word at Cambridge, and he slipped quickly into the office as if it were his of right. The salary of public orator was a very small one, but it brought its holder into general notice, and it was therefore sought after by rising young men of the day.

Soon, however, his heart began to feel searchings which stirred him up towards a nobler calling. He left suddenly the many-coloured life he was living: now at the university which loved his flashing wit, now in London which flattered his stately grace of person and carriage. From classic haunts, from gilded halls he vanished, and for a while the world heard no more of him. Scholars and fair court ladies wondered for a brief time about him, and then forgot him for the latest news in politics, and the latest fashion in dress. Meanwhile George Herbert, in a retired country region among the fields and woods of Kent, was finding his way to the high service for which, from the beginning, his Master above had intended him.

From this silence and solitude he at length came forth with a face that was as the face of one who had been communing with angels. He took holy orders at once, and was appointed to the prebendship of Leighton Ecclesia, near Lincoln. Thither he went, not slow to begin his work. Ruined, dilapidated church and drowsy parish soon felt the power of his energy. But ill-health, which was quickly developed out

of his natural delicacy of constitution in the unwholesome Lincolnshire air fresh from the fenns, forced him to leave his post almost before he had become fully aware of his new cares and duties. He gave up Leighton, and went to stay with a friend in Essex.

For some little time it seemed unlikely that he would ever do any more work in this world. Symptoms of consumption showed themselves, and all his friends feared that he would glide into a rapid decline. At this period Herbert's bearing was calm and cheerful; and steadfast in faith and hope, he awaited his call above. But it was not to be given just yet. Gradually his health recovered a certain extent of tone and vigour. To the end of his life he suffered from physical weakness; but he was now well enough to seek further change of air by going to stay with his kinsman, Lord Pembroke, at Wilton near Salisbury.

Here bracing Wiltshire breezes and cheerful society confirmed yet more his cure. Just then, the living of Bemerton, a village in the neighbourhood of Salisbury, was in need of a clergyman. It was in Lord Pembroke's gift, and he presented it to his young cousin, of whom he entertained a very high opinion. Soon after that, George Herbert was established in the vicarage at Bemerton.

A story is told of his induction to the living which forms a fitting key-note to the whole of his work and ministry there. As is usual on such occasions, the new incumbent locked himself into the church to ring the bell. This is commonly a short, formal ceremony; and those who accompanied Herbert naturally expected to see him quickly reappear. The minutes, however, went by, the shadow of the church spire fell longer and longer across the graveyard walk, many feet went up and down the village lane, but still the church door was not unlocked. What could George Herbert be about? The churchwardens fidgeted uneasily to and fro in the churchyard walk; Lord Pembroke looked grave, and began to think that really, after all, his young cousin was too eccentric a man to fill a commonplace position in every-day life. They listened at the church door, but no sound reached their ears; they tapped lightly the old, time-worn panels, but there was no response. At length, driven to desperation, they peeped in at the church window, and their impatience was changed into reverent stillness; there they beheld George Herbert on his knees.

Very soon after he entered his new home the young clergyman began to feel that there was something wanting in it—something that would fill it with light and music; and this something, which his mother had taught him long ago to know the worth of, was the presence of a woman.

Not very far off in Wiltshire there lived a Mr. Danvers, who had been for some years on terms of familiar intimacy with Herbert. This gentleman had several unmarried daughters, and the one among them whose fair face told most of the fairer soul shining within was called Jane. Now it so happened that this young lady had heard

about George Herbert, and talked and thought and dreamt of him, till without being aware of the fact she had fallen in love with him, though she had never seen him, or even heard his voice. On the other hand, George Herbert had had the graces of Jane Danvers ringing in his ears, from the lips of all the ladies of the family, all the while he was staying with his relations at Wilton, and had, no doubt, idealised the maiden in his poet's fancy. The result when the two met was, however, yet more swift and complete than even the most daring visions of a match-making maiden aunt had ever foreseen as possible. In three days after that first meeting Jane Danvers was Mrs. George Herbert.

The marriage was as happy, and bright, and peaceful as the course of two streams which have suddenly met, coming from different ways to flow on in one calm channel. Their minds harmonised in a taste for intellectual pleasures; their hearts harmonised in all warm and generous sympathies towards their fellow men. Best of all, their souls harmonised in high Christian hope and faith, and brave Christian practice. From that time forward, till she knelt by his dying bed, with her trust in her Heavenly Father's will making a rainbow in her tears, Jane Herbert was his help, his star, his melody; the queen of his home, the moonlight of his parish and his parish work.

It is a fair picture, that of George Herbert, in those years of his ministry at Bemerton. Before he came thither there had been, for many a year, no resident clergyman in the village, and the place had fallen into a condition of hopeless spiritual stagnation which, in these days, it is difficult even to imagine. Now, before many months had passed, it was all changed as by some gracious, mighty spell that had come straight from Heaven. The church was filled to overflowing, the word of God was in every hand, the fruits of the blessed Book was in every life.

Now we see him in the pulpit, the pale, sweet face all on fire from above, the thin hand raised in warning and supplication in turns, the earnest voice, with the pathetic break now and then in it that tells of disease and weakness, pouring forth words that grow bolder and stronger as they flow, and as the crowds of vivid imagery that are starting up in his brain, press into them. Now he is hurrying forth through sleet and hail on a winter's night to watch by the sick and dying. Now he is sitting at supper with some parishioner, his stately grace of manner contrasting strangely with that of his rustic guest, yet in no way hindering the tide of genial Christian sympathy which flows between them, rippling from lip to lip, shining from eye to eye. It is all from beginning to end one noonday splendour of work, of love, of energy, done in the name and the strength of the Christian champion's Lord.

And what words shall tell of the perfume, the mellowed radiance, the blending of sweet accords in that home at Bemerton, where prayer and praise guarded the threshold—where the sick and aged came to

seek relief and healing from Jane Herbert's gentle, skilful hand—where the whole atmosphere was full of the busy calm of steadfast, cheerful work—where the two little nieces whom the childless pair had adopted went dancing and singing to and fro between aunt's store-room and uncle's study, never so pleased as when some small errand of love was put into their charge?

Throughout all his life George Herbert was writing poetry, but no volume of his poems was published till after his death. His unassuming, sincere modesty seems to have been the cause of this. But in his last illness, his friend and curate, Mr. Woodnot, consulted him on the matter, and then he said that if his poems could be of any use to others in showing them his own spiritual conflicts, and how, through trust in his Saviour's merits, he had at length found peace, he was willing that they should be made known to the world. Accordingly, after he had gone up to God, his friends brought out a volume of his verses in print; the book became a favourite at once, and 20,000 copies of it were sold with a rapidity very unusual in those days. Glowing religious devotion that burns in every line, and a rich luxuriance of fancy that is always budding out into beautiful similes—these are the most marked characteristics of George Herbert's poetry.

Herbert's intellectual powers were not unrecognised, however, in his life-time. We find him now and then in London, and many figures of note are gathering round him as we gaze. Here is a form in velvet doublet and lace ruffles—a form that is all courtly grace, and that revels in showers of bows, while the lips rejoice in delicate conceits; this is Sir Henry Wotton. Next, a grave, scholarly-looking man, with thought printed on his brow, comes and lays his hand familiarly on Herbert's shoulder, and we know this is Donne, the poet-preacher. After that we see him exchanging a kindly salutation in the street with a burly figure which comes rolling along; and the name he calls this acquaintance is Ben Jonson.

George Herbert was not to remain long on earth. His gallant work for God and man, the joy he gave his friends, these things were to cease early as far as this world was concerned. As he drew toward middle life, his delicacy of lungs and chest began to make itself painfully apparent. He struggled bravely against disease and weakness for some little time; then, at the age of 39, he left his mortal dwelling with all its cares and all its sweetness, and went to his home above.

Alice King.

FLOSS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MRS. JERNINGHAM'S JOURNAL."

III.

I CERTAINLY thought that I saw recognition in her eyes, succeeded by an expression of piteous entreaty, a mute acknowledgment that there was a secret between us, and a prayer that I would not betray her. Afterwards I was not at all certain that I had read all this or no. If I had, it was so momentary—gone as soon as seen—that it was impossible I could be certain about it. And yet why should I fancy it? Why should I think I did, if I did not? for while I saw it, I did not doubt it in the least.

I don't think anyone heard my exclamation, the involuntary "Floss" that passed my lips. I think Heathcote was a little surprised for a moment. I think there was something in our first salutation which was not exactly commonplace, not quite what he expected; but if he had heard me call the young lady Floss, he would certainly have noticed it, and asked what I meant, and why I said "Floss," instead of "How do you do?" Mr. Fairfax was languidly lounging on a distant sofa, where he had sunk after Miss Heathcote had passed him, and Miss Mackenzie was knitting in another window.

There were a good many things I objected to in Miss Mackenzie, and one of them was that she was never idle. When there was nothing else to do she invariably produced from her capacious pocket a slip of white knitting. Now, in my opinion, nobody has a right to be always employed. I take it as an abuse of our faculties, and a reproach to those who are more moderate and less reckless in their use. Another of her peculiarities was that she invariably said the thing that she had better not have said. Whenever two or three words would make anybody uncomfortable, she always uttered them. Whether it was want of tact or ill-nature I am not sure, but the thing that had better not be said was always the thing that *was* said by her.

The whole of that evening I had an uncomfortable notion that we had a ghost among us. Miss Heathcote was so white and so quiet, there was something so shadowy about her in her transparent black draperies, her ghastly fair face, and in the noiseless way in which she glided about. I felt a little shiver run through me when she handed me my tea. Did the others, I wondered, experience the same? She never spoke unless she was spoken to, and she had never once raised her eyes since that first look at me. My head was full of fancies about her, and presently I began to feel an absurdly impatient desire to hear her called by her name.

Would anyone call her Floss? And what might Floss be short for? Flora?—Florida? And was it not strange that with father, lover, and aunt all present, no name of hers had passed any of their lips? My daughter, or Miss Heathcote, and never anything else.

Just as I thought this Sir George Heathcote made me jump by addressing her with the words: "Another lump of sugar, Florence."

Florence! Well Floss might be short for Florence, just as much as or Florida or Flora. Trifles light as air, some might say, but this trifle did seem tremendously confirming. No proof of holy writ could have produced a greater sense of conviction in my mind than that one word Florence. I felt utterly bewildered as the comprehension of what it really meant, really was, if I was not mistaken, became clearer to me. As I was less startled and confused, and more able to understand the situation, my bewilderment was overwhelming.

Pshaw! I *must* be mistaken; it *could* not be; what a fool I was to be upset in this ridiculous manner by an accidental resemblance.

"Were you out to-day, Miss Heathcote?" I asked, bravely.

"Yes, for a little while," in a low monotonous voice.

"You seemed quite well all the morning; I never *heard* of the headache till dinner-time," Miss Mackenzie, of course, remarked; but received no reply.

Mr. Fairfax sauntered up to the tea-table.

"I did a deal of business this time in London," he said. "I think everything is in trim now. Florence, do you like chestnut or bay horses best? I had almost gone in for buying, but I would not decide till I asked you."

"I don't know," she said, wearily; "I don't care for horses."

"Do you care for anything?" asked her aunt, sharply. "Girls were very different in my days; they took some interest in things."

"I don't like horsey girls," said Mr. Fairfax, with his languid drawl. But with all his fashionable impressiveness I noticed he always said the right thing at the right moment. "I'll choose the best and the prettiest horses I can get, and they won't be too good for their purpose."

No blush, or smile, or glance, rewarded this speech, and I thought he was a patient lover.

"Did you bring the photographs down with you?" Sir George asked.

"To be sure, I'd quite forgotten; they are in the pocket of my great coat. They came at the last moment, of course; too late to be packed." He rang the bell, and sent the man who answered it for the parcel.

"We have all been photographed," Heathcote informed me; "cabinet size. So now you shall give us your opinion of the likenesses."

The parcel came in, and was opened. There was Sir George, in full regimentals, uncommonly good; Mr. Fairfax, well enough, but

a little hard; and, the last of them, I took Miss Heathcote's portrait in my hand. I wondered that a lover or a father's heart could bear to see it for a moment. Such hopeless, despairing misery I never beheld. And yet how beautiful it was, and how like! I should not have recognised Floss in it, though; the whole character, everything seemed so different, and these, of course, told us as little as they always do tell in photographs. "I don't believe she is Floss at all," I mentally exclaimed. "What a fool I have been! Misled by the likeness in a pair of eyes—for I really think that must be the whole of it."

"It is a striking likeness," I said to Mr. Fairfax, for I saw I was expected to speak, and not to stand, wrapt in thought, picture in hand. "It is a striking likeness, but not a good impression; there is a little smudge, do you see, on one cheek." I took up another of them. "Yes; there it is again on that, too, and on this," taking up another. "They all seem to have it."

Fairfax laughed a little, and Miss Mackenzie said, rather loudly: "That's the mole on her cheek." Involuntarily, I turned my eyes on Miss Heathcote's face. Yes, there it was, below the temple, on the left cheek; a soft brown mole! Could I doubt any longer after that? I declare you might have knocked me down with a feather.

And now what was I to do or to say? What ought I to do or to say? What duty did I owe my friend? And how far was I bound in honour to the lady? And where, *where*—above every other question—where was Charlie?

Charlie might be dead; but one thing, at any rate, I was sure of, he had not died of that wound in his shoulder. And if Charlie was dead, Floss was a widow; and if Floss was a widow, why was she called Miss Heathcote?

One thought after another went chasing each other through my mind, till I was suddenly recalled to the drawing-room of Lowlands, by Heathcote's voice, saying: "You have cultivated a grand talent for silence, I think, since I saw you last, Dashwood."

I could have laughed in his face. Poor father!—poor, innocent father!—quietly quizzing me for absence of mind. If he knew the cause of it—if he only knew the cause!

However, with a considerable effort I recovered myself, and spoke out of the fulness of my mind, in a sort of reckless spirit, determined to make a plunge, even if I drowned for it.

"I'm not generally a very silent fellow, but something had somehow made me think of a visit I once paid to Guernsey. Were you, any of you, ever there?"

"Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, and Sark," said Mr. Fairfax gravely. "No; I don't think one goes there, does one? but one learns the names all in a heap when one is six years old."

"And much good it does one," said Miss Mackenzie. "I took trouble enough to teach Florence geography, I am sure, and only last

Thursday she asked whether Constantinople was in Egypt. Now, I dare say she knows nothing whatever about those islands."

"Come, Florence, prove Aunt Libby wrong," said Mr. Fairfax. "I'm sure you know all about Guernsey and Jersey. Tell her about Guernsey, Florence."

I was breathless, listening and watching.

The girl's lips moved in a ghostly manner, without giving utterance to any sound. I felt I was cruel, yet I persevered.

"We all know the geography of the places we have been in," I said. "Miss Heathcote, perhaps, has been in Guernsey?" My manner was one of the gentlest inquiry.

Then the splendid dark eyes suddenly flashed at me more and more, and in them lay the piteous expression of a hunted animal at bay, who had moral perception to condemn its hunter. I felt reproved, and determined to desist. Let her have been Floss; let her now be Miss Heathcote; let her become Mrs. Fairfax. What business was it of mine? Accident had made me the possessor of her secret. I was not her keeper. Honour enjoined me to let her alone. Then the words sounded in my ears—words long forgotten, but suddenly coming back to me out of the past: "Is there a doctor in the house?" and while I was listening to these words, I found Miss Heathcote's soft, monotonous voice was answering my question.

"I have travelled very little," she said; and so she saved herself from falsehood; no thanks to me.

"Florence was at school in France for many years," her father remarked.

"Much against my wishes, and much good it did her," was the pleasant rejoinder Miss Mackenzie, of course, had ready.

"It was an excellent school," Heathcote rejoined, in that stiff way of his I knew so well when he objected to a remark on the score of its being a little impertinent; "not only for education, but for motherly care and training."

"Motherly mountebanks—a French school!" cried Miss Mackenzie, worlds of scorn in her tone.

"It is getting late, sir; I think we are all tired to-night," said Mr. Fairfax's calm accents. I am sure he spoke to the world of weariness in his betrothed's fair face.

"And, indeed, a railway journey is a tiring thing when we are not quite as young as we were. You'll be glad to get to bed, Doctor Dashwood," said Miss Mackenzie, very pointedly, to me.

What a detestable old woman she was! I was years younger than Heathcote, and, in every respect, looks and all, a young man of my age. I could have taken any length of journey by train without feeling fatigue on that score. I have seldom felt crosser at a trifle than I did then, and I should have experienced pleasure in giving the hard Scotchwoman a good shake. "What an idiot Heathcote is to have her live with him!" I thought; but outwardly I only smiled

an inane smile, and assured her I was by no means overwhelmed by the extraordinary exertions of the day. We all wished each other good night. I was most anxious to let Miss Heathcote know that her secret, whatever it was, was safe in my hands, and that no further attentions of mine should alarm or distress her; but I did not know how to manage this, with her eyes always downcast, never raised to meet the gaze of another.

Her hand was in mine, and I gave it a very slight pressure. I *felt* a throb go up through her frame, and the unhappy eyes were raised for an instant. If ever a man's face wore on it the promise of honour and kindness, mine must have done so at that moment; my soul was so full of it. But the effect on her was not what I had expected and hoped. Her eyes became actually wild—there was an expression of horror in them and terror—wild horror and wild terror. Was that dreadful look always in her eyes, and was that why she never raised the lids; or was it that she could not bear the recalling of the past that lay in the meaning in my face?—the realisation from that that I *was* the man, and her secret was not her own?

I cannot tell, but this I know: that as I dropped her hand almost terror-struck and not knowing what to do, I perceived that Mr. Edmond Fairfax was watching us both closely, and looking most unfeignedly surprised.

No wonder he was surprised. What must he think of it, and how would it end? I wished heartily that I had never come down to Lowlands at all, and I began to think seriously of going away before the wedding.

Notwithstanding the extraordinary fatigues of an eight hours' railway journey to a man of my age, I by no means slept as well as usual that night; my mind was too full of this strange and unpleasant romance in which I so suddenly found myself involved. Now and then in the nervous hours of the night, when we are not masters of our minds as we are in the daytime, it seemed to me that it was my duty to tell her father or her lover all that I knew; and then I would jump from my bed and pace the room in great perturbation of spirit. Exercise of body brought back mental mastery, and I scouted the idea as against all laws of honour. My one desire in the morning was to see her again, and let her know that I was not unkind, and that whatever her sins and sorrows might be she had nothing to fear from me.

But at breakfast she did not appear, and her aunt informed Mr. Fairfax quite pleasantly that she had had a bad night—was ill, and it looked, to *her*, like a return of nervous fever.

Against his will an expression of deep anxiety came into his eyes, which his code of fashion tried to make express only indifference.

"Phew!" Sir George said; "that is nonsense."

"My niece is in a very odd state of health and *spirits*," was the

reply, with aggravating emphasis ; " fitter for a hospital, I think, than to be married."

" Experience having made you an excellent judge of both," Fairfax said, very politely ; but though his countenance was imperturbable, I could see that he was angry.

Heathcote laughed. Was he really not anxious about his daughter, and as obtuse as he seemed ? The idea suddenly struck me that he knew all about her. But no—then Fairfax would have known also ; for my old friend was the soul of honour. I resolved to learn all he could tell me of the engagement, for I began to feel like a conspirator who had joined in a plot against father and lover, and I wanted light thrown on my own situation as well as hers.

After breakfast, accordingly, I made him take me for a walk round The Limes, and then began to question him.

" They have been engaged half their lives," he told me, " by a family agreement between Lord Fairfax and myself. The properties join ; she is an only daughter, and I can leave her everything, so we thought it a good plan."

" And are they attached to each other ? " I asked, warily.

" Fairfax is as much attached to her as a man can be, and it will be all right with Florence when they are married, I have not a doubt about it. But you see her state of health now."

" Has she always had bad health and spirits ? "

" Oh, dear no. She was the merriest child, and Fairfax declares that at fifteen she was the life of every party she was in—the gayest creature. They used to meet during her holidays ; and when she was fifteen and he only a lad himself he told her what was intended, and she quite agreed. He fell in love with her, though she was a complete child, and laughed while she consented."

" And they have been engaged ever since ? "

" No, they have *not*. At least, they *have*, because we always intended it ; but two years afterwards she suddenly wrote and told him it was all a joke, or a mistake, and broke it off."

" And what did he do ? "

" He would not hear of it. He held her to the engagement, but told her to wait till he could woo and win her properly."

" Did it never occur to him," I said, slowly and doubtfully, for I felt the ground was dangerous, " that she might—care—for someone else ? "

Sir Marmaduke looked angry as he replied :

" Never ! because it was impossible ; she had seen no one—unless at school."

He spoke with such cool assurance that I could have laughed in his face, but it was a matter more for tears than laughter. And when I asked him how the engagement had come on again he answered, a little testily, that it didn't come on again because it had never been broken off. He told me further that he had not heard of her letter,

but hearing that she was in bad health, sent for her to India on that account—that they had been little with him as he was up the country, and she with old friends at Madras; that before they came home together the lady she was with told him her spirits were very fitful, and she thought she was pining for her lover, which had vexed him, as it seemed to him a little unneeded.

Wonderful! my poor friend; and if he had only known!

He said he had never spoken to her about this marriage till they were on the voyage home, and then she was dreadfully agitated; and at last told him that she had broken it off and could not marry him. Of course, he was exceedingly angry, and said no child of his should behave so dishonourably. There was a most distressing scene, after which she kept her bed for a week; she seemed more afraid of him than ever when they met, and they equally avoided a tête-à-tête.

"Poor girl," said I, "and she looks miserable now."

He assured me that was only from the fever. Then he suddenly admitted that he had had the greatest trouble with her—that her being so afraid of him distressed him; but in spite of the fear she had been utterly obstinate, and would not consent to be married. He considered her a most fortunate girl; and Fairfax had behaved admirably throughout. Now that he had broken the ice it seemed to me he found relief in telling his story.

"Then," he continued, "all of a sudden one day she was found in a fainting fit in the dressing-room. Such a fainting fit! Girls are extraordinary things. No *man* could have come to life out of it. It lasted for hours. I thought she was dead—I did indeed, and she never left her bed for nine weeks after it! That was the fever, you know. Her recovery was like a dead person coming to life again. And she was, and has been ever since completely changed—quite passive, and submitting to everything. Fairfax at last made her consent to marry him. She said she would in a year and a day from the day she was taken ill. Once there was a talk of having it a fortnight sooner, and she would not hear of it, and that is the only time I have seen her excited since her illness."

I felt like a traitor, knowing what I did, when I said—but I surely should have said the same had I known nothing: "Well, Heathcote, I come back to my first idea—a prior attachment."

"There is none!" he cried, with a decision that startled me. "Fairfax asked her. He said if there was a living man she preferred to him, he would not press his claims. She was deeply distressed and frightened, and said there was not."

"She said there was not!"

"You speak as if you did not believe me!"

I was absolutely silent for a minute, and then remarked, awkwardly, that I hoped it would after all be a happy marriage. What else could I say, and I was obliged to say something.

"It is all a question of health," he said, with decision; "and Fairfax will take her abroad for a year. They are going to ——"

"Guernsey?" I asked. Why did I say it? What a fool I was! The word presented itself so loudly in my thoughts that my tongue uttered it before I was aware.

He was greatly taken with the idea. They had not intended it, but yachting had been recommended, and a trip to the Channel Islands would be the very thing. He would suggest it to Florence.

"And say that I proposed it," groaned I to myself. "What a fool I am! What will she think of me? It is the conduct of a spiteful fiend."

So I earnestly set to work to persuade Sir Marmaduke that no place could be worse for his daughter than any of the Channel Islands, and that Guernsey was the most objectionable of all. I spoke with the authority of my profession. The damp, relaxing air would play the very deuce with her nerves; death might be the result; I would answer for nothing if she went to Guernsey. He was surprised at my vehemence, and quite began to soothe me as he promised to follow my advice, and declared that nobody had ever thought of Guernsey till I did. And I felt that from first to last I had made a fool of myself.

We had reached the house, and Heathcote went in; but Mr. Fairfax joined me in the garden. He glanced oddly at me, and I remembered that he had seen the look I exchanged with Floss the night before; so I began to talk of the garden with keen interest.

He answered to the point, and gave me civil attention; yet I could see he was absent. All of a sudden he said: "Miss Heathcote is no better," and looked hard at me.

"I'm sorry to hear it," was all I could think of saying. "Is she subject to these nervous attacks?"

"I don't know," he answered, gloomily; "not unless anything upsets her; she seemed upset last night, I think." Another look at me.

"Did she?" I returned. "I am glad if that is not her usual manner. Frankly, Mr. Fairfax, it is sad to see a young woman like *that*."

"Had you met her before?" he cried, with an abruptness that made me jump. "Excuse me, but I thought you looked at each other as if you had."

"My dear Mr. Fairfax," I rapidly answered, without giving myself time to reflect on how much truth or falsehood might be in my words, "I looked at her with the interest of my profession—to me there is something very remarkable in the expression of her eyes."

He stared at me, while a sudden alarm flashed across his face. I had struck a chord that he had heard before.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "you do not apprehend——" His eyes finished the sentence for him.

I hastily assured him I did *not*, but cautiously hinted that nervous

disorders were my speciality, and I should like to pay Miss Heathcote a professional visit.

"She hates doctors," he said, gloomily; "but as an old friend of her father's might see *you*. She has no faith in them. She was sure she'd die in that fever. And, by heaven! I believe she wished it. Do you know that she has worn black ever since?"

The last words rushed out as if against his will, and quite fiercely. He showed great emotion, and I was unaffectedly sorry for him. Like Sir Marmaduke, the ice broken, it seemed a relief to him to speak.

"It is miserably sad," he said, while his eyes asked me to contradict him. "And if you can do any good ——" He really could not say more.

"If she will see me, I will do my utmost."

The day wore itself away: no one seemed to know what to do with themselves, a gloom hung over everybody and everything. Miss Heathcote did not appear at dinner, and Mr. Fairfax said she would not hear of seeing me; declared she had only a headache, and should be as well as usual to-morrow.

"Yes, but what *is* as well as usual?" I said, pointedly.

I could not forget the wild agony in her eyes. I felt it would be a sin to make light of her case. If they would let her alone—let her go unmarried—the poor weary, torn heart might get rest.

"You make the worst of it," he replied, in gloomy displeasure.

"I hope I do, but I frankly tell you I think the marriage should be deferred."

"You are quite wrong there. All the doctors say just the contrary; and I'm certain they are right."

"Is the day fixed?"

"Yes, to-morrow fortnight, and next week the guests begin to arrive."

It was a dull dinner, and a dreary sort of an evening; everybody was out of spirits. A weight hung over us all, heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.

"This is an odd way of being married," Miss Mackenzie suddenly remarked, *à propos* to nothing.

"It won't be your way, will it?" drawled Mr. Fairfax, in his civil, languid manner.

"I hope you will like it, as it *is* yours," retorted she.

The next morning Miss Heathcote appeared at luncheon. She had appeared like a ghost yesterday, and to-day she resembled the ghost of a ghost more than anything else I could imagine. It was really shocking to see a young creature look as she did; and how father, lover, or aunt could allow matters to proceed at all, I did not understand. I am sure she only came downstairs to avoid the medical visit she thought I might insist on paying her, and she gave me the idea of being in mortal terror—a terror which I believe was

caused by my presence, and which, at all hazards, I felt that I must relieve.

After luncheon—Mr. Fairfax, who was grave, and, I declare, I thought even pale from sympathy, perhaps—proposed to drive her out. I wondered whether they really had *têtes-à-tête*, and what they did with them if they had; but at all events, she declined this one. Without raising her eyes she said, in that low, expressionless voice of hers, that she was not equal to it, but must go and lie down. And then she vanished, and did not appear again till tea-time. I really felt unequal to keeping up a conversation with either Heathcote or Mr. Fairfax, so I retired to my own room for the afternoon, on the plea of having letters to write. When there, however, I spent a good deal of my time walking up and down, and reflecting as to what ought to be done—which meant, in fact, what I ought to do.

Only one thing I could clearly see my way to; or, perhaps, I might say two things. The first was, not to betray Miss Heathcote, and to let her know that I would not betray her; and the second, to get the marriage deferred. Once deferred, there is no saying that a thing will ever take place, and this is most especially supposed to be the case with a wedding. Once miss an opportunity, and somehow or other it is not only missed, but lost. At teatime, I turned the conversation, taking advantage of some case that had appeared in the papers that day, to the inconsistency of punishments as dealt to offenders. This easily, and without the least strain, led to offences, legal and otherwise, and I made my argument that offences not punishable by law were, as a general rule, far worse than offences that were. I took the common instances of starving people stealing bread; and yet the starving wretch who stole food would be as severely punished as if I stole Mr. Fairfax's diamond pin. Then I went on to say that there were other crimes, that in the eye of the law were not crimes at all—for instance, deceiving a person, or betraying a secret. Here I raised my voice, and began almost a harangue; and I saw Heathcote regarding me with surprise, and doubtless thinking to himself "How a few years does change a fellow!" for in the old days haranguing was by no means one of my tendencies.

"A man who accidentally becomes acquainted with a secret——" I paused, markedly. "Miss Heathcote, may I ask for another lump of sugar." I was determined to secure her attention, and pretended not to hear Sir George's "Dear me, Dashwood—why, you never used to take sugar at all!"

"A man," I repeated, having made sure that if Miss Heathcote had been in a brown study, I had roused her out of it, "who accidentally becomes acquainted with a secret, and does not keep it—who does not feel himself bound by honour and humanity, although no promise has passed his lips"—I said this very emphatically—"I think is far more guilty than he who steals property

that he can grasp in his hand, and which, like the secret, belongs to another."

The splendid eyes rose at this moment to meet mine, an eager question in them, which mine answered, and then they sank again—surely I did not fancy it?—with a wistful expression that made my heart beat fearfully fast.

But—why is there always a *but* in everything?—we were not the only people in the room with eyes, and again I saw that Mr. Fairfax had intercepted our glances, and was regarding us with grave and puzzled surprise. I suppose, in a quiet, unperceived way, he was always watching Miss Heathcote.

I assumed the most *déagé* air in the world, and went talking on—prosing, I am afraid—till Sir George groaned; and then I saw that Fairfax was still looking at me, and with the eyes of a detective. Why, I had thought the man slow, and that almost anything might occur under his very nose without his perceiving it, and all the time he was as sharp as a needle!

"But with regard to those secrets?" he said, with his pleasant drawl. "Secrets are shadowy, shabby sort of things, to begin with, are not they? And for people to be going about with secrets and—and private understandings—among unsuspecting ladies and gentlemen, is a little *base*, isn't it?"

I did not think it possible he could really imagine how a private understanding existed between Miss Heathcote and myself; but the more I saw of Mr. Fairfax the more I liked him, and I began to worry myself as much about him as for her. For his sake, as well as for hers, the marriage ought not to take place, and I was the only person who could prevent it. But how could I, when I had just voluntarily, and with determination, tied myself hand and foot? Had I not bound myself to Miss Heathcote not to betray her, even if I was not bound before?

The next day, and the day after, she was no better, and only appeared at tea.

Then I took courage, and on the following morning told Sir Marmaduke that the strain was too much for his daughter's nerves, and that, as a medical man, I advised the postponement of the marriage till they were stronger.

He would not hear of it, any more than Mr. Fairfax; and after some arguing I urged that, at any rate, it should be a quiet wedding. He was not so unwilling here, and said he would talk it over with the bridegroom.

He found Mr. Fairfax in an anxious state of mind, and quite ready to agree that a quiet wedding might be best.

Accordingly, a good many guests were put off. Those that must be asked could assemble at Lord Fairfax's, and only a few come to Lowlands at all, and that not till the eve of the wedding-day. I offered to go too, but Marmaduke begged me to stay, and said I was

a comfort to him. And as I saw he was feeling more than he chose to own, and had also myself an intense anxiety to see the play out, I remained.

I think we all felt more or less that something was looming in the distance. For my own part, though I will not admit that my fears took a tangible form, I found myself always thinking of the "Bride of Lammermoor." Lucy Ashton was for ever in my head, and I kept fancying resemblances between her and Miss Heathcote, till, in self-defence, I took down the third volume of that terrible book, and read bits here and there, trying to convince myself that I was tormented by a mere fancy. I was overwhelmed with confusion when Sir Marmaduke found me with the book in my hand, and was eager to disabuse his mind of the ideas such a sight must give rise to. I need not have troubled myself. He laughed at me for reading a novel, but admitted that Scott was worth a second perusal; and as to the "Bride of Lammermoor," he said: "Do you know I think it the best he ever wrote. I read it on board ship, and was very much struck with it; only *no* people, you know, could put a girl into such a position as *that*!"

And so the days passed on; and, but for the interest that deepened every hour, I have seldom spent a more painful time. And to every one in the house I am sure it was a time of weariness and fear. During the last few days before the wedding, Miss Heathcote had more colour in her cheeks, more light in her eyes, and sometimes joined in the conversations; but I noticed that instead of seeming cheered at this, Mr. Fairfax was even graver than before.

One evening she suddenly spoke without being spoken to—an un-ghostlike proceeding that gave me pleasure.

"You won't forget, Edward," she said, "to continue the allowance to old Widow Jones."

"How can he forget, with you there to remind him?" her father asked, smiling.

"I mean when I am dead," she replied, simply.

It was as if a thunderbolt had fallen among us.

She blushed, and looked as beautiful as an angel, and said: "I forgot that papa did not know. I have told Edward."

"What do I not know?" asked Sir Marmaduke, with suppressed emotion.

"Nothing, sir, nothing," said Fairfax. "Only an absurd notion of Florence's. She has got it into her head these last few days that she is going to—to—die!"

Poor fellow! he could hardly get out the words, and there were tears in his voice, though he affected to laugh.

"Bless my soul, how very extraordinary!" cried Heathcote.

"She ought to be ashamed of herself," said Miss Mackenzie.

"I don't see that," said Fairfax; "it isn't wrong to die."

"But *why* do you think it, Miss Heathcote?" I asked, mildly.

"I don't think it," she replied. "I feel it—I know it."

"I think it is foolish to talk so," Fairfax said, with assumed calmness. "It is a thing no one can know."

"I say she ought to be ashamed of herself; it is shocking and unnatural," reiterated Miss Mackenzie.

"Dear me!" said Fairfax, innocently. "I thought death was an act of Nature."

"And you ought to be ashamed of yourself, too," she exclaimed, angrily. "One would think you wished her to die!"

And then she burst out crying; and for the first time I felt that I liked the old woman.

My fingers stole stealthily to the wrist of the fair girl, which was deadly cold this warm summer's day. I felt, and then I spoke:

"Then let me tell you," said I, "that the wish, humanly speaking, has no chance of being gratified. The pulse I am feeling is that of a person who may live to three score years and ten for any serious mischief existing now."

Everybody looked relieved, except the young lady herself, who gently shook her head.

Next morning she came down to breakfast in a state of exultation—the first time I had seen her at the breakfast-table. It was the day before the wedding. That evening a few guests were to arrive; and if this glow and brightness lasted she might, to eyes that were not penetrating, pass as a good imitation of a happy bride.

After breakfast she took Fairfax into the garden, the first tête-à-tête she had, to my knowledge, permitted. He agreed, with his usual calmness, and the lovers, if such they could be called, disappeared among the shrubberies.

Later in the day he asked me to smoke with him in the stable-yard.

"I want your advice," said he. We were very good friends in a quiet way, he and I. "Miss Heathcote has had—a dream." And he looked oddly at me from the corner of his eye.

"Ah!" I said, startled; "a dream!—may I hear it?"

"She dreamt she was—*dead*—lying in her coffin. It was white. She was in her wedding-dress—white flowers in her hair—all white together. And she is as sure as I am that I stand here now, that she will die to-morrow. She *knows* we shall *not* be married!"

He chucked away the end of his cigar, and spoke the last words fiercely. "She says we may go to the altar, but we shall not be married. She was not buried in that coffin. She was in Heaven. She knows it was Heaven by a sign she had; but she would not tell me the sign. Well, what do you think of it?" And he stared me in the face.

What did I think of it, and what could I say I thought of it?

"You know," I began, slowly, "*I wanted* the wedding deferred—but —"

"It is too late now. It might have been better if we had followed your advice; but we did not, and now it's too late. We could not defer the marriage the day before—and for a dream!"

"I can advise nothing but a composing draught at night."

"I wish you had seen her when she told me her story. She certainly has no idea but that she will be dead by this time to-morrow."

He spoke with excitement, and I gave a little shiver as I heard the words.

"And I have no idea," I said, rather crossly, "of putting any faith in dreams at this time of day. Miss Heathcote will not die an hour sooner because she dreamt she was lying in her coffin."

"But her firm persuasion that she *will*, perhaps shows a—a—nervous state of mind," he said, hesitatingly.

"I will observe her closely. But it is all of a piece—one thing after another, and no inconsistency between any of them. I did all in my power. I spoke to Sir Marmaduke as well as to you about the marriage being deferred."

"I am sure that was very good of you," he said, drily.

"I did what I thought was right, and I hope no one will repent not having followed my advice."

The few guests that were expected arrived in due time. The bride showed herself in the evening, and if she appeared silent and distant, those are qualities that are rather to be expected in a bride. Her eyes were radiant, and a soft, delicate colour was in her cheeks.

Mr. Fairfax seemed relieved, but whether only because she did not attract observation for the present moment, or that his mind was easier about herself, I could not tell.

And so we all went to bed the night before the wedding.

The next day was one of those indescribably beautiful days that, even in the midst of a beautiful summer, take you by surprise; that seem to have an individuality of their own from their mere freshness and sweetness; days that make an impression on the mind not easily forgotten.

I must confess that I had slept very little during the night. My mind was too vividly awake with the thought of the morrow for sleep to be possible. It was absurd how her dream had affected me. I seemed to *see* her there, before my physical eyes, lying beautiful and dead in her coffin, in her white marriage robe, and covered with white flowers. I told myself over and over again that the wedding would take place, just like other weddings. She

would be married, and she would go away with her husband, and then all this worry would be over. And if I was left with an unsatisfied curiosity I should soon forget it in other things, instead of being able to think of nothing else in this detestably ridiculous manner. And yet, though I told myself this over and over again, I had a presentiment that it would not be the case, and that something unforeseen *would* happen.

However, we all breakfasted as usual, and Miss Fairfax communicated to her friends that dear Florence seemed very well, and was taking some coffee. The six bridesmaids had of course come to Lowlands to sleep the previous night, and the breakfast was as gay as it could be. Mr. Fairfax, equally of course, had gone home, and I wondered, with sincere pity, how he was feeling, and what he was thinking.

When the time for starting came, we all left in various carriages for the church. Not a glimpse of the bride had anyone had up to this time, except, of course, the bridesmaids, who were privileged to enter her rooms. I expected every moment that something would happen—that Miss Heathcote would perhaps suddenly disappear, and that the next thing to be done would be to drag the ponds. But, instead of that, all went smoothly, and in the most commonplace way, till the vehicles in which the guests were deposited had left the house; I finding myself in one of them, with Miss Mackenzie and old General Scofield.

The drive was in length about half a mile, and a very few minutes placed me among those waiting in the church to receive the bride and her father. In a very few more I heard their carriage drive up. There had certainly been no unusual or unnecessary delay here. And then they entered the church just as any other bride and her father might do. Sir Marmaduke, tall, thin, and erect, looked remarkably well as he escorted his daughter up the nave—and what a vision of beauty she was!

Accustomed as I was to her loveliness, it took me by surprise. The white wreath, the flowing, transparent veil, the shining white robes, had an ærial look about them, and gave somehow an angelic, unearthly character to her beauty. She looked too radiant for earth, yet the radiance, though exquisite in its beauty, was scarcely either joyful or bridelike. There was neither expectancy nor hope in it. There was no love. Her eyes were "*not* the eyes of a bride whom delight makes afraid;" and whether I would or not, her dream returned to me, and those words rang in my ear—

"But fate is the name of her, and his name is Death."

Mr. Fairfax, of course, had been in his place for some time. He was pale, and vainly endeavouring to preserve his usual languid insouciance of demeanour. His anxious eyes sought her face as she entered, and then turned on me with something almost like triumph in them.

Had he not reason for triumph? She had come—he was there—any uneasy doubts as to what *might* be, were satisfied. A few minutes more and she will be his own. She took her place before the altar, her lover by her side, and the service commenced.

What a fool I had been, with all my fear! How much worry and anxiety I might have spared myself!

The clergyman began, "Dearly Beloved." This parson happened to have a high, rather shrill voice; and I thought his way of reading the opening address very disagreeable. He got through it, however, with the solemn appeal at the end for any person who knew any reason why the marriage should not take place to speak then or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.

Suddenly the idea flashed across me that I ought to speak. Suppose I now stepped forward, and declared that I knew a reason to stop the vows that had not yet been uttered, and so myself fulfilled my own presentiment. But, even while I thought this, the shrill, high voice had got beyond me, and was making a similar appeal to bride and bridegroom.

Will she speak where I was silent, I asked myself; but not a sound interrupted the shrill, high voice, which preached on to the question, "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" and I was breathing freely, knowing that there was nothing further now to disquiet myself about, and that smoothly as matters had flowed till this moment, so smoothly would they continue to flow till the end—when there was a sudden sound outside the church door—a sudden, violent sound like the rushing gallop of a runaway horse brought in one instant to a standstill. The door was flung open—a man—madman, no doubt—covered with dust, flushed and desperate, ran up the nave, shouting out, "Stop, Stop, Stop, in the name of God!"

There sounded no irreverence in the Holy Name thus spoken. The man did not look mad, neither was his speech that of a madman. Young, tall, dark, handsome—a manly, noble-looking fellow. Surely, I had seen him before?

There was no time for thought. The clergyman stopped reading—the bridesmaids were scattered—the bride and bridegroom turned round, and then came the supreme moment.

"Floss!" cried the man, and he held his arms open.

"Charlie! Charlie!" in faint tones, yet full of passionate joy, came from her lips, as she flung herself into the arms extended to receive her.

He held her, with her white marriage dress floating about her, close to his heart; the orange flowers, worn for another, were crushed against his breast. Will anyone who saw it ever forget the tenderness in that young man's face as he looked down on hers—tears falling out of his eyes, and he just murmuring, "Floss, Floss?"

She had fainted away. What was to be done? Her father, I suppose, must take her, and Mr. Fairfax would probably be the

person who would have to kick *him* out of the church. Only, he had not the least idea of agreeing to either one or the other arrangements. Possession is nine points of the law. He was not going to give her up, neither was he going to be kicked out of the church by anyone.

Mr. Fairfax walked up to him, and in a low, fierce whisper demanded: "What does this mean?"

The man looked at him, tears still dropping from his eyes, his handsome face ablaze with joy and love.

"She is my wife!" That was all he said.

There was a little expectant pause and hush in the church.

"He is mad!" cried Sir Marmaduke; but Fairfax shook his head. He saw, and everybody saw, that he was not mad. The clergyman was a fool, and said, in his high, shrill voice, "Hadn't we better go on?"

Go on, when the bride had flung herself into another man's arms, who said she was his wife, while he held her fainting form! Mr. Fairfax behaved uncommonly well. It is a trite remark at weddings that "the bridegroom behaved very well;" but never was bridegroom more tried or behaved better under trial than he did.

He turned at once to Sir Marmaduke and Miss Mackenzie.

"She is ill," he said. "Sir," to the man, "these are her father and aunt; let them take her into the vestry; you and I have nothing to do at this moment but think of her health. Give her to her father."

"She is my wife," said the young man, and he carried her into the vestry as if she had been an infant in his arms, and with all the gentle tenderness of a mother to her babe.

We followed him—Sir Marmaduke, Mr. Fairfax, Miss Mackenzie, and I. I do not know whether they were surprised at my coming in, but I felt that I might be wanted.

I could see in Mr. Fairfax's face that he had no doubt of the truth of the story. I could see that he believed the man was his bride's husband. Whether he had in any way accounted to himself for her conduct I could not tell, but that he knew he had lost her I could see. And this knowledge made him defiant.

She was laid on a bench in the vestry, and as she lay there with her bridal robes and flower-crowned head, and her eyes closed, and her face white and soulless, as if dead, I thought of her dream, and shivered. I looked at Mr. Fairfax, and I knew he thought of it also.

She opened her eyes, and smiled up into Charlie's face. "Yes, it *is* heaven," she said; "*I am* dead. That was the sign."

And she looked bright, smiling at Mr. Fairfax, and then directed his attention to her husband by a radiant glance. But now Sir Marmaduke Heathcote had recovered himself enough to interfere. He came quickly in between his daughter and the strange man. He spoke with much emotion. I do not think I ever had seen him show so much.

"We are disgraced for ever, Florence!" he said. "We can never lift our heads again! *What* does it mean? Have I no longer a daughter?"

Florence shrank from him, even as she lay there, with a trembling fear on her like one in actual physical pain. Ah! she need not have been afraid. She need never fear any one more. She had one by her side who had sworn to cherish and protect her, and who meant to do it.

"We were very wrong," he said simply, stepping in between the girl and her father; "but it was all my fault. She was almost a child—and, indeed, I was little more than a boy. Of course, we would not do it now. But then I thought it was the only thing we *could* do. Of course, I was wrong."

"But why did she agree to marry me?" asked Mr. Fairfax quietly. He turned to her with that sweet, protecting tenderness of his.

"Why did you, Floss?" he said, as if it was the simplest thing in the world he was questioning about, and of course she had done right and could explain herself; but finding she did not do so, he instantly found a reason for her. "Did you think I was dead?" he asked easily, and she murmured, "Yes, yes," and closed her eyes as if half dying herself over the dreadful idea.

"She thought I was dead, you see," said Charlie, quite pleasantly, to Mr. Fairfax. "That explains it. Now don't you think it would save a deal of bother if she just changed her dress, and she and I went away together?"

His eyes had a brilliant smile in them, and his voice trembled a little for joy, as he made the proposal.

"You are more likely to leave this under an escort of police, young man," said Sir Marmaduke. "I don't believe one word of your story."

"Let us take the matter quietly," Mr. Fairfax suggested, "and make the esclandre"—with a sigh—"as little as we can. Of course, proofs must be produced."

"I believe there is no doubt about it," said I; "I met them myself."

Charlie wheeled round, and stared at me; then burst out into a laugh, which he quickly checked.

"Why, doctor, is it you?" he cried. "What luck! Yes, indeed, this gentleman did meet us in Guernsey shortly after we were married, and attended me for an accident. There is not a doubt of it."

Sir Marmaduke and Mr. Fairfax both turned.

"You have known it, and kept it from us," cried the first in a rage. "It was *base*."

And Mr. Fairfax said: with withering contempt: "I did think you were a gentleman."

I wonder whether I ought to have told?

Of course, Charlie had his proofs, and produced them, and it was

a great help to him in craving pardon, and being allowed to take possession of his wife (I wonder who could have prevented him?) that he turned out to be a baronet, and the possessor of a large fortune and fine estates. He was the very heir to the baronetcy that had been advertised for in all the papers some months before, and buried in the wilds of Australia, an old paper happened to come in his way, that contained at once the advertisement for himself, and a notice that "a marriage had been arranged" between his wife and Mr. Fairfax. Each had believed the other to be dead, and hence his selling out and seeking his fortune in Australia, and her reluctant consent to marry another.

When the gay young officer persuaded Floss to run away with him from the French school, he had no prospect of the baronetcy. The foolish children had not enough to live on between them. They married in the holidays. Floss had cleverly persuaded the principals of her school that she was passing the time with her aunt in Guernsey. Of course it was all very wrong, but Charlie had simply bewitched her. Then she returned to school and he to his regiment, and by-and-bye, when he had made his fortune by crowning himself with glory, the marriage would be recognised by a delighted father-in-law.

But the course of true love ran very roughly. Charlie's regiment was ordered to Africa, and he took part in many campaigns, fought the Queen's battles, and lay wounded in her Majesty's hospitals without any Floss to nurse him, or the advantage of any medical attendance.

Then came the false report of her death, and he took his ruined life to Australia. The ship was wrecked, and his name given in among those on board who were lost, and he never cared to contradict the report. It was on reading the account of the wreck of the Achilles in the *Times* that Florence fainted, and afterwards had the fever, from which she arose careless of what became of her, and submitting to her father's wishes because she had not energy enough to resist them.

I think I have now explained everything to the satisfaction of everybody, except that Charlie came by that wound for which I attended him from his own carelessness in handling a pistol, and only made a mystery of it that Floss might not be alarmed.

I hope I shall not be accused of advocating runaway marriages when I add that after they were forgiven and all the fuss over, Charlie and Floss were as happy as the day is long, and that I have the highest opinions of them both.

Heathcote made friends with me again, and we shook hands; but Mr. Fairfax never quite forgave me. And now, what I want to know is, whether I ought to have betrayed Floss?

SCOUTS' PROPERTY.

IT would be an interesting investigation, for one who had the leisure or the curiosity, to trace the history of certain articles which exist on a College staircase, belong periodically to the Scout, and are sold, again and again, to successive undergraduates. When a man goes down from the University he can hardly include among his luggage such articles as a coal-scuttle or a slop-pail; and they and a host of similar valuables become the perquisite of the Scout. Consequently, that personage has always a large and miscellaneous assortment on hand wherewith to inveigle the unwary fresher. Caps, gowns, and B.A. hoods; lamps, kettles and saucepans; slop-pails and baths, coal-scuttles and coffee-pots are leased out, so to speak, by their owner, the Scout; and the lease falls in every year or so, when the articles revert to their original owner and are then leased out afresh.

In the course of their precarious career what a number of hands—and how different the hands—they must pass through! What histories they must have, some of them!

Take one of those battered old lamps, for instance. What wild orgies it has lighted; what jovial choruses it has listened to; what mad merriment it has witnessed; what wholesale consumption of preserved fruits, logwood port, brandied sherry and gooseberry champagne it has connived at; what reckless profusion and wanton destruction it has watched with its steady glare! Or perhaps it has been the solitary companion, *solus cum solo*, of the overtasked student, consuming health, eyesight, capacity for enjoyment along with the midnight oil. They could tell queer tales, some of those old lamps, if they got the power of speech. And I wonder how many globes and funnels they get through in the course of their career.

There was my copper kettle now. When I went up to Oxford I was resolved to spend my money judiciously, and had resolved upon a block tin kettle. But my Scout, a venerable gentleman, who subsequently left eight thousand pounds behind him when he died, said no! A copper kettle would be dearer at first but far the cheaper in the end. Let him choose one; he knew where he could get a first-rate article, perfectly new, for sixteen and sixpence, and I should not repent the investment. Why the bottom would almost go out of one of those tin things if you dabbed them down hard. Overcome by the logic of experience I acceded, and the kettle, bright and beautiful as a winter sunset, was my own.

It was a splendid article. There was a sangfroid about it, a coolness of disposition which prevented it from boiling, on any provoca-

tion, at less than half-an-hour. On a cold night, if I came in late, it would sit the fire out without the slightest sign of emotion—not even a breath of steam. It stuck its spout up in a sort of arrogant way that said, as plainly as in words, "Make me boil if you can; I defy you." If, however, I piled up the fire and made my room like a cucumber-frame, it would condescend to get up steam. When it did boil, it did nothing by halves. It sent out a mighty roar of steam; then it discharged jets of water into the fender and rusted the fire-irons; then it suddenly fell over on one side, emptied half of its contents through the lid, and sent a shower of ashes over my legs.

It was a bran new kettle, as I have said, and this makes it the more odd that, after three weeks, it leaked. It usually sat, when off duty, in the coal-scuttle; and I was not pleased one evening to find the coal-scuttle full of water and the kettle empty. My Scout said it was quite incomprehensible, and took it to be mended. I had a short respite from it, and then it came back. It immediately broke out in a fresh place. It was mended again, but it went on at the same game. By the time I had suffered from it for two years it was another kettle. Human beings, they say, are renewed every seven years; college kettles, apparently, every two.

It took up a lot of room, too. Put it on the fire, and nothing else was visible; neither could you feel any warmth. It was an uneasy concern; it never seemed to fit the coals. It was always lolling to one side or the other; or it stuck its spout in the air and the water came out at the lid; or it tumbled forwards on its face and dribbled into the fender. On one occasion I was reading late into the night, or rather into the morning. The book was "Mill's Logic;" and delighted at suddenly understanding what I had been studying for an hour and a half, I kicked up my leg, hit the kettle's spout, and got a bath of scalding water over my foot. I danced round the room in agony, while the kettle leant forward and spouted with derision. It was two in the morning, too late to send out for oil and cotton-wool, and there was no one up who could assist me. I had more respect for my brazen-fronted adversary after that.

At last I resolved to get rid of it. One dark night, when all, save a few, were asleep, I stole like a thief round the silent quad, starting (at the College cat) like a guilty thing, and carrying my copper tyrant in my hand. Into the back quad I went, and pitched the monster quietly into the street. Then, with a sneaking triumph, I returned to my rooms and laughed to think that it was gone. I got a tin one and was happy.

Just at the end of term the freshman from the attic above me came down and borrowed my kettle, remarking that his leaked.

"It's very odd too," said he, "for it's a new one—a copper one, and I haven't had it more than a month."

"Very odd," said I, "they will do it. I'll come and have a look at it."

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I went. There it was, in the old attitude, sticking up its spout out of the coal-box. The coals were damp as they were wont to be. I picked it up and examined the bottom. Could I mistake those scars and patches? It was my old enemy, doubtless picked up by the Scout, and sold, as a great bargain, to the guileless fresher.

When I went down it was still in College. It is there now, I have no doubt, for it has the gift of eternal youth and is always renewing itself. And that Scout has made his fortune.

So much for hardware. Turning to articles of personal adornment, I have a vivid recollection of Jones's cap and gown. When Jones came up he was instructed to be very economical; which instructions he acted on for the first fortnight, as most of us do.

"Where can you get a cap and gown, sir?" says the Scout. "Well, sir, you can get them at Foster's or Standen's by paying the price. But I happen to have very good second-hand ones that will just about fit you, sir. Better have them than go to the robe-makers."

Jones listened to the voice of the charmer, and got the Academicals in question—for a few shillings more than they would have cost new. The gown was too tight—he was a Scholar, and it was decidedly too short. But then the cap was too big, so that made things equal. It was a rare cap—happily. It either fell rakishly over one ear; or it tumbled on to his nose, as though he were trying to disguise himself; or it rollicked on the back of his head, as though he had sat too long at a wine party. It was not good for throwing at anybody else, for it always took a bias and went in an unexpected direction. Having broken a lamp and two or three picture-glasses, Jones gave up using it indoors. One day he took a shot at a man standing under the Sub-Warden's window. It missed the man, but it rose like a bird and went through the window. Jones fled in horror, slipped out through the back gates, and bought a new one. As the spectacle of a new cap might excite suspicion, he broke the board in two, and cut the cloth off the corners. The Sub-Warden stood at the chapel door next morning, and watched the men go in. He did not stop Jones as being the owner of the cap that had come through his window, but he called Jones up and said:


"You have a most disgraceful cap, sir. It is the cap of a drunken and disorderly man, sir. Please appear in a decent one in future."

Poor Jones had plenty of animal spirits, but was a teetotaler!

Now take articles of vertu. There was a pair of bronze candlesticks which I bought from the Scout when I went up. They were very beautiful; but beauty is fragile. It was hardly safe to move them, they were so susceptible of dissolution. I have seen one of them in as many as three pieces at once. The sockets, being connected with the main body by a very slim and elegant stem, were wont to collapse, candle and all, and put one's heart in one's mouth. Each stood on three feet, or rather, each leant, for they resolutely

declined to maintain the perpendicular. They were bronze ; which made it strange that so much of them was black sealing-wax. They went through so many vicissitudes and caused me so much innocent excitement, that I was sorry to leave them. When I had them they were pretty much of a height, so far as one could guess ; but when I left them, one had grown, by repeated absorption of sealing-wax into the system, a head taller than the other. I wonder what their relative sizes are now.

The extraordinary thing about this leasehold property is its wonderful vitality and recuperative power. Like the phoenix, it springs into renewed life from its own ashes. Of course an exception must be made in the case of crockery and glasses, which, indeed, have but a brief span of existence. But in spite of the severest usage, most of the Scout's stock-in-trade remains in use with wonderful pertinacity ; so much so, that an instance of actual dissolution causes a shock of surprise to those acquainted with the subject. I well remember my feelings when I saw, propped up in the porter's lodge, a sponge bath, with the mournful legend on its battered adverse, "Not worth repairing." It is true that it belonged to a Don who had been many years in College, and perhaps had been the property of a dozen men before, but it was the only instance in my experience, and impressed me accordingly. Otherwise, most articles on a College staircase would seem to have permeated themselves with the elixir of life, and to maintain themselves in existence, at once a trap to the unwary undergraduate, and a perpetual source of profit to the Scout.



ASHES TO ASHES.

"JUST a few trifles—mere rubbish," I said, peeping over Hilda's shoulder into the drawer. Hilda gave one glance and then went on with her work; while I leant idly against the old bureau looking at Hilda's reflection in the convex mirror above us, with the gilt eagle dangling chains and balls from its beak, perched on the top.

Half a shutter near us was open and the only sunshine admitted into the house of mourning streamed in right on Hilda's little head of sunny hair, and her slim white hands as they deftly sorted, folded, tied and labelled packet after packet from the pile of papers before her. It caught a blue jar with a peacock's feather in it in the green gloom beyond her, and shone full into the face of the dead master of the house, smiling sedately from his picture frame at his sweet, demure wife on the opposite wall.

I had done my share of the work, so I drew out the drawer—a long shallow one for loose papers at the top of the old-fashioned escritoire: we had not noticed it at first—and sat down with it on my lap in the big, shabby leather arm-chair, sacred till now to Uncle John's own special use.

Odds and ends, such as seemingly grow up of themselves in unused corners. A key, a whistle made of an elder twig, some sweet-smelling berries strung into a bracelet with a garnet bead between, and a common little red purse with portraits of the Queen and Prince Albert on the back. Utter trash.

"This is the last drawer," said Hilda presently. "I think we have done everything now; but go over it all again, Dora, please."

I thought carefully for a moment, recalling, as well as I could, that grey dawning (how many days ago, I wondered) when the dear kind voice that I loved so well spoke its last words to me:

"Dorothy, dear, as soon as you reasonably can after my death, take this key that opens the four little drawers in my bureau. It is all yours. Everything I have is left to your mother and you two. What you find in the top drawer, put into my coffin. I should like to take the poor trifles with me, as far as I can. Then there are private letters; read and destroy at your discretion. They are tied with green ribbon. The business letters, tied with red tape, are all in the right-hand drawers. Keep them to assist Mortley in winding up affairs. God bless you, Dorothy. Marry some good man who will take care of you—but don't expect to be all the world to him. The best of women never was that yet to the best of husbands."

What made him say that, I wondered.

He seemed too tired for more speaking. Hilda came in to take my place as nurse, and I never saw him alive again.

In the uppermost left-hand drawer we had found a pile of yellow letters directed in a neat, sloping Italian hand to my uncle, and indorsed in his square black writing, "From my dear wife;" and another package, older and yellower, tied with faded blue ribbon, "From Anne Pelham, during our engagement." They lay on a piece of soft muslin, easily recognisable as the large handkerchief that covered Aunt Anne's pretty shoulders in her portrait, above the low bodice of her crimson satin dress. The original of the little hair brooch with the pearl setting was pinned to it. We folded the letters in the limp discoloured muslin, fastened them with the tiny brooch, and laid them reverently at the dead man's right hand in his coffin.

The rest had been a long day's work, but all was now finished.

"You are tired, Dora darling," said Hilda. "I will run home and see mother, and stay if she wants me. Get Mercy to bring you some tea, and I'll come back when I can."

Our mother, Mrs. Dorward, lived in a little crooked cottage, all red-tiled roof and chimney-stacks, some little way down High Street, the one street of Fairdale. She was partially paralysed, and one of us had always to stay with her while the other acted as companion, and, lately, as nurse to Uncle John. He was head of the firm of Mallowdale and Mortley, solicitors, and the offices occupied the ground floor of the big red house that stood without intervening railing or area on the High Street pavement.

Uncle John had often begged my mother to take up her abode with him, but she had grown used to her own house and her own ways, and change was a pain and weariness to her.

"Hilda!" I exclaimed, suddenly pricked as one sometimes is by an extravagant fancy in moments of sadness. "Have we made a mistake? Is this the drawer he meant?"

"Oh, Dora!" said Hilda, with a world of quiet reproof in her eyes. "When you know all my aunt was to him! The best-loved woman that ever lived."

"I didn't think," I stammered in my confusion, slipping the bracelet over my wrist. "What is the key?"

"A duplicate one of the bureau," suggested Hilda, and she was right. "And the whistle is what he used to make for us children." I slipped the purse, empty, into my pocket, and replaced the drawer. Hilda glided away, and old Mercy appeared with a tray, as she did half a dozen times a day, feeding being inseparably connected with bereavement in the ideas of her class.

"Do keep up and eat something, Miss Dorothy, dear," ran her well known formula.

I complied. "Sit down and rest, Mercy," I said, for I was glad of the old woman's company. "And tell me, did you know my aunt when she was Miss Pelham?"

"Of course I did! I remember as if it was yesterday. The big house by the post office being done up, and the new brass plate on

the little green gate, 'Messrs. Parker and Pelham, Surgeons.' And when I was told that the new doctor—old Mr. Parker's nephew from Lon'on, he was—had got one daughter, a regular beauty, I says directly: 'She'll just do for our Master John!' And next Sunday there he was a-carrying her prayer-book home from church, like as if it were fate; and a lovely couple they made: and a church steeple and two lovers in the bottom of my tea-cup that very same evening, as sure as you're alive, Miss Dorothy!"

"So it was love at first sight, Mercy?"

"Well, may be so. Everything was so suitable. Dr. Pelham had money and got all the county practice at once; and Master John's father and mother they wanted to see him settled with someone they knew; and the young lady wasn't likely ever to have met a finer young man anywhere than our Master John. And so it all came about quite providential-like."

"And they lived happy ever after." I ended the story for her, making a stray sunbeam dance on my teaspoon.

"Aye, that they did. Never a crooked word or a cross look between them that ever I see. And I lived with them married for thirty year, and with him mourning her faithful for ten—so I ought to know."

Mercy trotted away briskly with her tray, and I sat musing. Sweet garden sounds and scents stole in through the half-open window. A big bee, all yellow from the lily bed, boomed sleepily in and out again; Mercy's big white cat was sunning herself on the top of the red-brick front wall, and the chaffinches in the pear tree, who knew right well that she was too old and fat for bird-catching, were only pretending to be in a flutter at her neighbourhood.

I felt at odds with the calm sunlit peacefulness, and Mercy's story, which seemed to belong to it, left the vague burden on my spirits heavier.

A calm, prosperous life; mapped out by one's parents. A wife who loved her husband because he was the first comer. An existence bounded by the narrow limits of Fairdale society. A steadily increasing business and income, of little profit to a childless pair. Was it worth the pain of dying—was it worth the pain of living to have passed through this?

"No midday shade, no clouded sun,
But sacred, high, eternal noon,"

kept ringing in my head—a hymn of my childhood that always inspired me with doleful apprehensions respecting my future enjoyment of Heaven, supposing I did get there.

"Is that to be our life—here—on earth, I mean? We shall be comfortable beyond belief. Mother can have a big subscription at Mudie's, and try every new device in fancy work that the mind of man has invented. I shall go shopping at St. Bride's with a heavy

purse and a light conscience. All our dear little makeshifts and contrivances are at an end. Hilda will marry the curate and reign at the rectory some day, and visit at the dean's and all the county families ——" I dropped an angry tear, and, ashamed of myself, closed the shutter and left the room, crossing softly the wide landing and entering the darkened chamber where the dead man lay in the stillness.

I gazed at his face; noble and stern in repose.

"You look strong enough to have made your life for yourself, not to have accepted it from the hands of others," I thought. "Good-bye, good-bye." I laid my hand gently on the cold forehead. As I did so, the worn string of the bracelet gave way and the beads slid from my wrist into the coffin. I could not regain them without disturbing the dead, and, horror-struck, as at a sacrilege, I fled away. Next day was the funeral.

Hilda and I wished to go to see the last of our kinsman, but we found that the old-world views of Fairdale society were against the proposition, so we gave up the idea.

Everything was done in strict obedience to precedent to the gratification of Mercy and Fairdale's opinion. We watched the gloomy procession forming, from behind the closed shutters.

"Look at that woman by the steps, Hilda. Who can she be?"

"Some casual passer-by. It is not a Fairdale face. Ah! there is the coffin with our wreath of white roses. I do hope the people here won't think it popish."

"She is sobbing so pitifully! I wonder if it is anybody he has been kind to?"

"There is Sir John Hartley's carriage—yes, and the Crossholme carriage, and I believe the earl is there himself—how very gratifying. Dear uncle! he deserved all the respect that could be shown him. Your woman, Dora? Oh, I dare say she has had some recent loss. She was in mourning, wasn't she?"

"She did not follow them—she went down the Crossholme road."

In the afternoon I could bear the closed house no longer.

"Come to the churchyard, Hilda. No one will see us to be scandalised."

The Mallowdales had a vault under the raised chancel of the irregularly-built old church. The entrance was already bricked up, and on a projection of the stone-work hung a memorial wreath. Hilda looked at the tawdry white flowers and brilliant green tin leaves with much disfavour.

"I didn't think such a horrid thing was to be bought in Fairdale," she said. "It must have come from St. Bride's—sent as an advertisement by some of those new shops—rubbishy thing!"

"Leave it there, Hilda. It may have been meant in kindness."

Hilda turned homewards.

"Let me stay longer," I pleaded. "I will just go through the copse as far as the Crossholme road. I am pining for air and sunshine."

So I crossed the churchyard, and lingered a few moments in the golden corn fields beyond. Then over the stile and down the dry sandy path I plunged into the warm green shade of the fir trees. It was a little-frequented path. I was almost startled to hear a child's voice crying, and to see—a few paces in advance—a tall woman in black sitting on a fallen tree. She rose before I reached her and moved wearily on, trying to quiet the little child in her arms.

"She is young—she is old—quite old. Not a Fairdale person. She doesn't walk like a countrywoman. She isn't a tramp from St. Bride's." So I thought as I followed her. She suddenly sat down again, as if dead beat, and began to hush the child. "Hush, hush, Mimi, love. Grannie can't carry you, if you scream so."

"Grannie!" I said to myself in amaze. The little knob of hair behind was grey, certainly: but she wore a fringe, and her dress was youthfully cut, and trimmed with a picturesque sort of frilled tippet about her shoulders.

She looked full at me with her big dark eyes. Curiously attractive eyes, though red-rimmed and swollen. I stopped. Hilda was not at hand to consult as to the propriety of the doing, so I spoke.

"Your baby seems to be troublesome. Can I help you?"

"She is starving with hunger. I never thought I should not be able to buy a drop of milk in this village," she replied; politely slurring over an adjective uncomplimentary to my probable residence. "I never brought anything with me, thinking I should be sure to find shops, or, perhaps, a farmhouse; and now she must wait till I get her to Crossholme."

"To Crossholme!" I exclaimed. "What a journey! And you are taking the longest road."

"Well, it's the quietest," said the stranger, with an odd look. The child, who had been gazing open-mouthed at me, now recommenced her plaining. She was about two years old, very pretty, with eyes like Grannie's, looking through tangled rings of yellow hair. I knew Fairdale well enough to believe the woman's statement.

"I know where to get something," I exclaimed, with sudden recollection. "Wait here for ten minutes," and off I started at a run, back the way I had come. Another path through the corn-field ended in Hobday's Farm, and Mrs. Hobday, kind soul! on hearing half my story, pressed me to help myself to half a gallon from a brimming pail; and then loaded me with a hunch of seed-cake, a slice of sage-cheese and a pocketful of rosy apples. Back I sped to my new acquaintance.

She was still rocking the crying child, whose mouth we stopped effectually with cake and milk, first thing; and then I broke down the bracken and made a little nest where she sat, munching peacefully, while Grannie stretched her tired arms with a sigh of relief.

"She is my daughter's youngest child, and I thought a day out of London and smoke would do her good. We must wait till seven o'clock for our train at Crossholme," said she, wearily.

"You had better rest here, then," I suggested, tossing the apples to Mimi. "This little one is getting drowsy. You can leave the milk-can at the first cottage on the Crossholme road, as you pass."

"How good you have been to us! Thank the lady, Mimi." Mimi kissed the tips of her fingers with an airy little grace, though almost at the same moment her head nodded forward, and the wedge of cake dropped from her other hand. I loosened the ribbons of her big bonnet, and tried to settle her comfortably, while Grannie continued: "And now, please, tell me how much you paid for me?"

I began to explain, but stopped, utterly amazed. She had put her hand in her pocket and drawn out a little red-leather purse, gilded, gilt clasped, with portraits of the Queen and Prince Albert still recognisable on the back; and the hand that held it was braceleted with a string of brown berries and garnet beads!

She tossed it into her lap and drew forth another, a big and useful purse. Then something in my looks struck her.

"I don't suppose *you* ever saw a purse like that. It was bought at St. Bride's, at Bride's Fair, years before *you* were born. The Queen was just married, and they were all the fashion."

I don't know what made me do such a thing, but I drew from my pocket the fellow purse to hers, found in my uncle's old bureau, and held it out to her. She looked at it and then at me, with white cheeks and scared eyes.

"What is it? Do you know me? Are you *his* daughter?"

"I am John Mallowdale's niece. Who are you, and what brings you here?"

"Oh! I have done no harm! I have broken no promise. I felt I must see him once more. John, *my* John!" and she burst into bitter weeping.

After a few moments she grew calmer, and, speaking with a sort of sad dignity that impressed me, said: "You must please listen to all the truth now, or else you will be making guesses, maybe, at a falsehood."

She took up her purse and opened it. There was a pocket in the green silk lining from which she drew a small glazed card, "Mr. John Mallowdale," in print on it, and underneath in my uncle's hand, "With respectful devotion." On the back of the card was scrawled "To-morrow, dearest, at eight," and tied to it was a crumbling scrap of a dried flower.

Then she took my purse and looked in the corresponding pocket. There was a folded paper in it from which a curl of dark-brown hair slipped and uncoiled itself dry and lustreless.

She laughed and unfolded the paper—an old playbill of the Theatre Royal, Crossholme."

Somebody's Benefit appeared in large capitals, and far down the bill one name in small print was underlined with broad black strokes. "Miss Millicent Tracy." The same name appeared again as singing some song "in character," between the pieces, and again in the last performance. She looked at the worn crumpled little slip tenderly.

"Yes, he stayed to the very end of that stupid little farce to see *me*," she murmured.

"Are you Miss Tracy?" I asked.

"Mrs. de Vesci Trent," she replied. "You have heard of me, I dare say?—No?"—with a look of surprise in her fine eyes—"Well, I have worked my way into some little renown since those dear happy Crossholme days when I was a mere slip of a girl with nothing but bright eyes and a tolerable voice to recommend me."

"Where did Uncle John meet you?"

"At the theatre, of course. I saw him directly, in the stage-box, with a number of other young gentlemen. I had never seen such a bright, handsome country boy's face before, and he looked so interested in all of it! 'Romeo and Juliet,' for Mrs. Delancy's benefit. I was the Count Paris's page, and had plenty of time to look about me. You see, I had never been out of London before. Crossholme was the first town on our provincial circuit. He stayed to the very end of that rubbishy little farce; and next day at rehearsal there he was with old Delancy. That was the manager—my uncle. I lived with him and his wife—good old souls! How they and everybody joked me about my admirer!"

She reseated herself on the tree-stump, her lap filled with the poor relics of her past, her day of youth. A shaft of light athwart the soughing pine boughs struck and broke and danced on her shabby old gown and the aged wrinkled fingers, round one of which she was twining idly the long nut-brown curl of hair. I felt dizzy with the medley of incongruous ideas that she had raised in my mind. Uncle John, a "gay, handsome country boy," whose dead face as I saw it in his coffin still haunted me, grim and silent. Harder still to link memories of love and admiration, songs and dances to the actual sight of the grey old face before me. Her dark eyes flashed suddenly upon me as I mused.

"Don't be afraid of a long story. Mine was short enough. Meetings, compliments, bouquets and a formal proposal at the end of a week. Old Mr. Mallowdale and his wife were away, you see; and that was how Master John came to be all by himself in Crossholme. Do you see that card? It was fastened to the bouquet he threw me one Saturday night. We were to go out together for the Sunday as an engaged couple. Fancy our holiday! A start in a chaise in the early morning, and a long drive through the fresh country lanes to breakfast at a farm-house, and then on to Filby Ness. Do you know it?"

"The pretty headland and bay about ten miles off? Yes."

"Well, think of seeing the sea there for the first time in your life,

with your first sweetheart beside you ! We played on the sands like two children, picked shells, repeated all the poetry we knew till we were tired, and then found an elder thicket where we unpacked our picnic hamper. After dinner we set to work seriously to discuss our prospects. We agreed, I remember, that if my beauty, virtue and talents did not melt the hearts of his stern parents, he was to forsake all—actual clerkship and possible partnership—for me, and under my able tuition rise to fame and fortune as an actor, special line to be decided hereafter. The bells were ringing for afternoon service in the little church close by. We went and sat hand-in-hand on a gravestone with our feet in the sweet long grass, and kissed and settled to be married in that church and no other. Oh, what a sweet, silly, sunshiny time ! Laugh if you care to at the notion."

"No, no, not for worlds," I exclaimed earnestly. I was strangely interested in this odd woman with her sweet voluble utterance ; now checked by a sob, now by a half-cynical laugh. Little Mimi was asleep ; her head on my knee.

"My story ended next morning. Delancy received a visit from old Mr. Mallowdale that threw him into a violent passion, and made him weep over me and use bad language about John till I was utterly miserable and scared. After rehearsal he dragged me off to the White Hart and there in the coffee-room was a fierce old gentleman who said many things that I don't care to repeat. He belonged to a school that didn't hesitate to clothe coarse ideas in strong language when occasion required. I thought of John, and held my ground against him easily enough. John sent me encouraging notes, and appeared night after night pale and stern in his box ; but Delancy forbid any nearer meeting.

"Then one day I had a very different visitor ; your grandmother, my dear, and a very clever woman she was ! Bless you, it makes me laugh and cry now to think how she turned and twisted poor little me round her delicate finger in no time. She appealed to my generosity, my love for John, my pity for her, his broken-hearted mother !

"When I saw her, a real fine lady, I recognised for the first time how great the social distinction between us was. And when I saw her grief, her dignity, her green satinette pelisse and leghorn bonnet with three tall ostrich feathers, all prostrate before me, calling on my magnanimity to save her boy if I loved him, what could a romantic chit like me do but say, Madame I love your son far too well to work him any ill. We part from henceforth, for ever ! So she cried and I cried, and she offered me a bracelet and a hundred pounds, and I would take neither (and was sorry for it afterwards). Then she kissed me and blessed me and went away, taking with her a shabby little note of farewell to John and his only present to me of any value, a bracelet. He gave it to replace one of mine, like this, which he had carried off and vowed to keep till death. Ah ! where is it now I wonder ?"

I knew ; but was silent.

"I kept the purse that he had bought me one day for a fairing, and a whistle he cut me in the elder wood. Mimi plays with it now. Delancy's company left Crossholme next week, and three years after I married Barker, our leading low comedian, otherwise de Vesci Trent. We got on pretty happily. He died before I was twenty and I have worked hard for myself and baby ever since. I never heard again from John (though somehow when an unexpected bit of luck fell in my way now and then I fancied his hand was in it) till, nine years ago, one cold wintry day, his name was announced, and a grey-headed gentleman, very like the one who frightened me so many years ago at the White Hart, walked in."

"The year of Aunt Anne's death!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, He was free, so was I, and he had come to make me his wife, if I would."

"You refused!"

"Ah! child! child! What had he or I in common with the boy and girl who made love among the daisies and buttercups at Filby? Our lives had grown too far apart to meet now without a strain. Then we were boy and girl with our future to make together. Now we were old man and woman bearing each the burden of a past. A struggling actress with a troop of grandchildren. A prosperous, intensely-respectable country solicitor. Absurd, on the face of it! I am glad to think that I was the first to see it. So we said 'Good-bye,' and wished each other 'God speed' on our separate ways."

"Poor Uncle John!" I sighed.

"Why poor?" returned she, sharply. "He dined with me, and was introduced to my daughter and her husband, and departed; giving thanks for having honourably satisfied his conscience without incurring any disagreeable consequences."

"Mimi is waking. I must go," I said.

"Good-bye. You will never see me again, but I am glad we have met. I wonder if you will think of me as the blessing or curse of John Mallowdale's life? I wish I knew which I have been! Good-bye, good-bye!"

She rose, and taking little Mimi in her arms with a sweet, sad smile and gracious bow, turned from me and stepped briskly away down the shady wood-path. I would have followed and borne her company on her way, but I saw her lay her face against the child's and guessed that she was crying bitterly.

Truly some women are riddles—and men too. To think of Uncle John—but I *don't* think of it, if I can help. It will be my one secret from Hilda and mother. I had placed the purse in Mimi's little sash, where Grannie might find it, and the poor little berries—his sweetheart's keepsake—lie in the dead man's coffin. Perhaps that *was* what he asked for, after all.

BY THE SALT SEA WAVES.

CAPTAIN EDWARD BARTON was very fond of lounging in the large window of his sea-side lodgings after breakfast, and watching the girls go down to bathe ; and by the time they had had their dip, and were walking or sitting in the sun to dry their hair, the gallant officer was amongst them. Captain Barton was not to be caught with chaff, though ; he knew pretty well whose hair was Nature's gift, and whose had been carefully taken in its owner's fair hand and shaken in a pail inside the bathing machine "to make it match the rest."

There were two girls to whom no exception could be taken. Their cheeks had a healthy bloom, their eyes sparkled with youth and merriment, and their hair—that of one was brown, and the other golden—grew out of their own heads ; and as our Captain passed them a delicious salt smell hung about the dishevelled locks that was quite inspiring. He was just ruminating to himself as to whether blue eyes or brown were best, when a voice with a rich oily brogue attached to it arose behind.

"Don't be cutting me, now, Barton ! But sure, ye've got some excuse for blindness after staring at that girl's wicked eye so long !" For a refined, polished young man like Captain Barton to be thus assailed was most aggravating ; but having satisfied himself that no one else heard the remark, he greeted this vociferous brother-officer civilly.

"I've run down for a dip," pursued Captain O'More, genially ; "and I never saw a prettier couple of girls than those I saw ye looking at ! Do ye know them at all ?"

"Not in the least. Impossible for a man to know all the girls he sees at a sea-side place."

"Och, then," said O'More, looking back after the girlish figures which were now arranged on either side of a stout old lady, "I'd go out of my way to have a few minutes' conversation with the two of them."

"Sorry I can't introduce you. Have a cigar ?"

"Not just now. Have they bathed yet, do ye know ?"

"Why, man," cried Barton, laughing, "how should I know ?"

"Ye might have seen them. But I think they have, for their hair's all wet. Will you dine with me to-night at the 'Bear' ?"

"Thanks—yes," said Barton. "Where are you off to now ?"

"To enjoy myself—and find a way of knowing those girls."

"Impossible !"

"To a stolid Englishman like you, yes ; but where there's a beauty

in the case, leave an Irishman alone! I bet you a guinea I get acquainted with them this very day."

"Absurd! I'll take you at once, O'More."

During the very hot afternoon the two young beauties and the stout old lady went busily in search of live curiosities for their aquarium. Captain O'More kept an eye on them as they strolled amongst the rocks below, while he was on the cliff above. At last he saw the old lady sit down on a sheltered bit of sand, quite exhausted with the heat; and then he went down amongst the little pools and rocks. Fervently and earnestly he groped in every hole as if aquariums were his livelihood. At last, by a rare stroke of fortune, he found something (he did not know its name) that drew the eyes of the two beautiful young ladies enviously towards him.

"He's *got it*! and we shan't find another, I know!" murmured one disappointed fair to the other.

Quick as thought, the Irishman secured what he knew now to be a prize, in his pocket-handkerchief, and then sauntered on. The girls approached the old lady, and he saw the three were eagerly watching him. He pretended to have met with further success, and stooped as if to secure another treasure. Then he saw the old lady ambling towards him, a sort of dumb apology breaking in every gesture.

"Pardon me, sir," she commenced, "but we have for days been disappointed in obtaining an addition to our aquarium—*would* you allow me to see if you have secured what we have failed in finding?"

O'More lifted his hat with most retiring grace, undid his handkerchief and listened rapturously as the lady excitedly cried:

"Beautiful creature! Bertha, Winifred, the very one you are looking for!"

Then O'More's hat was raised once more respectfully, and he had entreated the acceptance of the jelly-like substance he was secretly longing to get rid of.

"Oh! no," said brown-haired Bertha. "It wouldn't be fair—would it, Winnie?"

"No," murmured Winnie, looking softly up. "We thought you had *two*."

"Pray, madam, oblige me by accepting it for your daughters," said the cunning Irishman, still besieging "mamma"—and somehow or other, when the treasure was transferred, he followed up his opportunity by offering his card and begging to be allowed to send them some other very fine specimens the following day.

The card was respectable—and moreover—the mother of the girls knew some O'Mores; and Captain O'More declared(!) that the people she knew were his cousins; and then with an assumption of that assurance which emanates from the Emerald Isle in rich profusion, he went back through the town beside Mrs. Graham. Captain Barton met him walking with expanded chest, and beaming

smiles; and could scarcely believe his eyes when his successful friend calmly nodded and slightly winked at him!

"I'll take my guinea now, Barton; it will pay for the champagne," said he, when he joined the captain.

"There you are. Perhaps you'll introduce *me* now?"

"With pleasure, my boy—but first we will dine, and then we can go out to listen to the band and so on."

A capital collection of "things" for aquariums was purchased forthwith and sent to Mrs. Graham; and now every day the old lady's work was cut out, for Captain O'More was always in attendance on Bertha while Captain Barton paid unmistakable attention to Winifred. It was painful to witness the chaperone's efforts to see what was going on before and behind her. She was just meditating on securing her daughters to two long chains of her *châtelaine* when Captain O'More proposed and was accepted; and no doubt her efforts in the other direction might have happily relaxed but that on the very day when such *very* decided proofs of hopeless adoration were visible in Captain Barton's face, something happened—right in front of all the people who had been watching the affair for days, too!

"*Dear Ned, I am so glad!*" cried a gushing voice; and Captain Barton turned with a slightly heightened colour to greet a fashionably-dressed girl, who continued to run on. "Do come and take me out; it is so fearfully dull in the hotel, and mamma can't stir in the sun, you know." And he raised his hat politely to the Grahams, and Winifred saw "that girl" take his arm and march him off as if he were her property!

Later in the day a dowager asked Mrs. Graham if she had seen that "lovely Mrs. Barton?"

The British matron's ire was roused; but no signs appeared to show the vexation felt, as Mrs. Graham coolly enquired:

"*What Mrs. Barton?*"

"Captain Barton's wife—you saw her this morning, you know."

The moon was shining over the restless little ripples that broke on the rocks that night; and many lovers were wandering in their fool's paradise. But two that we know of were not.

"Where's Winnie—and Barton?" demanded O'More of his future mother-in-law, as she grimly sat out the watch the lovers were keeping.

"Winnie is at home—and your friend, I presume, is where he ought to have been long ago, with his wife!"

"It is his *wife* ye say?" hotly enquired the Irishman. "By jabers, Mrs. Graham, I'm not the man at all at all to hear my best friend slandered!"

"You saw her yourself walk off the parade with him arm-in-arm his morning," cried the mother, waxing warm in her turn.

"Just excuse me, ma'am; I see it all!—when Winnie saw that, she

thought he was married. No, ma'am, we have no such scoundrels in 'ours'? That lady is the wife of Barton's sailor brother, and her own husband is in China. And you cut Barton dead to-night near the band.—I'll go and find the fellow."

And before that moon had paled there was another pair of lovers, and Mrs. Graham sat in her easy chair pretending to crochet, and listening drowsily to a double fire of earnest requests for the fixing of early wedding-days.

MINNIE DOUGLAS.



A GOOD-BYE.

FAREWELL! How soon unmeasured distance rolls
Its leaden clouds between our parted souls!
How little to each other now are we—
And once how much I dreamed we two might be!
I, who now stand with eyes undimmed and dry
To say good-bye.

To say good-bye to all sweet memories,
Good-bye to tender questions, soft replies;
Good-bye to hope, good-bye to dreaming too,
Good-bye to all things dear—good-bye to you.
Without a kiss, a tear, a prayer, a sigh—
Our last good-bye.

I had no chain to bind you with at all;
No grace to charm, no beauty to enthrall;
No power to hold your eyes with mine, and make
Your heart on fire with longing for my sake.
Till all the yearning passed into one cry:
"Love, *not* good-bye!"

Ah, no—I had no strength like that, you know;
Yet my worst weakness was to love you so!
So much too well—so much too well—or ill—
Yet even that might have been pardoned still—
It would have been had I been you—you I!
But now—good-bye.

How soon the bitter follows on the sweet!
Could I not chain your fancy's flying feet?
Could I not hold your soul—to make you play
To-morrow in the key of yesterday—?
Dear—do you dream that I would stoop to try?—
Ah, no—good-bye!

E. NESBIT.



M. ELLEN STAPLES.

"IF YOU HAVE WON HER HEART, MARK, TAKE HER."

R. AND E. TAYLOR.